

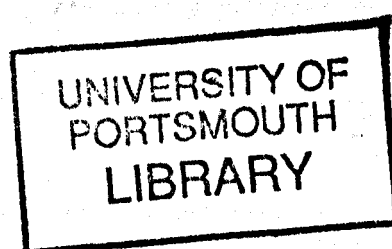
The Decline of the French Communist Party:
the Party Education System as a brake to
change 1945-90

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THE DECLINE OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY: THE PARTY EDUCATION SYSTEM AS A BRAKE TO CHANGE 1945-90

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The decline of the French Communist Party (PCF) was a key feature in French politics in the 1980s, one which was analysed in a number of scholarly studies. These focused on the four established contributory causes, i.e. the transformation of socio-economic structures in France since the late 1960s; institutional factors (presidentialism and bipolarisation); the rise of the French Socialist Party since 1974; and the sharp deterioration of the Soviet image in French public opinion. Although these studies were also in unanimous agreement that, to a large extent, the party leadership with its orthodox regime and intransigent practices must bear responsibility for the Party's failure to adapt, they failed to offer any explanation and analysis of the reasons or mechanisms behind the leadership's motives and behaviour and therefore gave an incomplete picture of the decline. The novelty of the approach adopted in this study is that, whilst not denying the importance of the other contributory factors, it focuses primarily on elements which enabled the party leadership to sustain its immobilism in the face of changes which were taking place in the Party's social, institutional, political and international environment. Thus, by focusing on the internal dynamics of the PCF, this investigation shows how, by the skilful utilisation of the Party's organisational principle of democratic centralism, and by the methodical use of its political training system, the leadership ensured the availability of ideologically sound cadres who would perpetuate the conservative outlook of their superiors. It is asserted that the communist political training system therefore formed one of the most important institutions for the perpetuation of the private and all embracing world of French Communism. We also argue that the Party's political education system that had begun to mould leaders in the Stalinist era, became, in the hands of orthodox and intransigent leaders, a significant brake to change and a further manifestation of the PCF's conservatism and inflexibility. Consequently, the question of how the PCF trained its cadres is fundamental to the understanding of the Party's evolution and its eventual decline.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Aims of the Study	1
Origins of the Study	1
Sources and Method.....	4
Contextualisation	7
The Working Hypothesis	9
Notes and references	12
 CHAPTER 1 THE DECLINE OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY	16
The transformation of socioeconomic structures in France	17
Institutional obstacles.....	19
The Socialist element	23
The Soviet factor.....	28
The Communist leadership	31
<i>"Un syndicat des défavorisés"?</i>	32
<i>"La sérieuse menace du nouveau mécanisme institutionnel"</i>	36
<i>"Une démarche de zigzags"</i>	38
<i>"Bilan globalement positif"</i>	39
<i>"L'effet Marchais"</i>	40
Democratic Centralism as a tool of the leadership	42
Conclusion	46
Notes and references	47
 CHAPTER 2 POLITICAL EDUCATION: THE MOULDING PROCESS	52
Political socialisation	53
<i>"The Quest for the Homo Sovieticus"</i>	55
<i>"Etudier pour agir, agir en étudiant"</i>	57
The function of Scientific Marxism in political education	65
<i>"On ne naît pas communiste, on le devient": the "ideal Communist"</i>	68
What is a cadre?	70
The perfect cadre: an example of the "ideal Communist"	75
Conclusion	77
Notes and references	79
 CHAPTER 3 THE ORIGINS: FROM CHAOS TO ORDER (1920-39).....	87
The origins and early development of the PCF's political education system	87
"Bolshevisation" and party schools	90
Changing strategies of the PCF and their effects on the political education system .	94
The International Lenin School.....	98
The Popular Front: more education for more members.....	100

Towards the "total school experience"	104
Conclusion	111
Notes and references	112

CHAPTER 4 FROM GOVERNMENT TO GHETTO (1944-64)..... 119

<i>Le Parti des Fusillés</i>	119
Resurrecting the education network.....	121
The organisation and functioning of the party schools.....	124
<i>"Le grand schisme"</i>	128
<i>"Apprendre pour mieux lutter"</i>	128
<i>La Bataille du livre</i>	131
The school experience.....	132
<i>La politique communiste</i>	133
<i>Training in action</i>	135
<i>Learning in Moscow</i>	137
<i>"L'année 1956 va s'ouvrir, pleine de promesses"</i>	140
<i>"Changements à petits pas"</i>	144
Conclusion	145
Notes and references	147

CHAPTER 5 LOVE THY BROTHER (1965-80)..... 152

Early aggiornamento at the central school.....	153
Towards the Left Union	154
<i>"L'union est un combat"</i>	160
<i>"Socialisme aux couleurs de la France"</i>	165
Eurocommunism in political education: a subtle shift.....	168
<i>"Fermez la télé, lisez L'Humanité!"</i>	171
The student population of the central schools 1974-80: <i>démocratie avancée?</i>	173
<i>The sociological composition of the student population</i>	174
<i>One-month schools 1974-80</i>	175
<i>Four-month schools 1974-80</i>	177
<i>"Des élèves heureux": the bonding process at the central school</i>	179
Conclusion	183
Notes and references	185

CHAPTER 6 NOTHING LEFT BUT BEING THERE (1981-90)..... 189

Political education in a tail-spin.....	189
<i>"Seul contre tous!"</i>	192
<i>"Orthodoxe et enfermé dans ses certitudes place Colonel-Fabien"</i>	194
<i>"Il n'est pire aveugle que celui qui ne veut voir"</i>	198
Epilogue: <i>"Nous et l'URSS"</i>	200
The lean years of cadre training.....	201
<i>One-month central schools 1981-90</i>	202

<i>Four-month central schools 1981-90</i>	204
Fewer Indians, fewer Chiefs?.....	206
" <i>Jusqu'au dernier souffle</i> ": the ideal cadre of the 1980s.....	209
" <i>Le Grand Séminaire</i> "	214
Conclusion	219
Notes and references	220

CONCLUSION.....	225
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Another " <i>voyage à l'intérieur</i> " of the French Communist Party.....	225
<i>Bilan – globalement</i>	231

TABLES

Table 1.1 The PCF's Electoral Performance 1945-1997	23
Table 1.2 The PCF's Membership Figures 1945-1987.....	24
Table 1.3 The PCF's Social Composition 1954-1979	33
Table 1.4 The Sociological Composition of the PCF's Politbureau 1947-1990.....	35
Table 5.1 Elementary Schools 1966-1973	159
Table 5.2 Party Schools 1969-1972	160
Table 5.3 One-month Central Schools 1974-1980.....	176
Table 5.4 Four-month Central Schools 1974-1980.....	178
Table 6.1 One-month Central Schools 1981-1990.....	202
Table 6.2 Four-month Central Schools 1981-1990.....	204

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	<i>APPRENDRE, mars 1947</i>	236
Appendix 2.	<i>APPRENDRE, août 1947</i>	236
Appendix 3.	<i>APPRENDRE, décembre 1951. Etude individuelle</i> <i>("Fils du peuple")</i>	237
Appendix 4.	<i>APPRENDRE, mars 1953. Numéro spécial</i>	237
Appendix 5.	Letter written by Paul Fromonteil, accepting to give a lecture on the subject of " <i>Front unique</i> " at the one-month central school in August 1973.....	238
Appendix 6.	Letter to Jean-Claude Delaunay, requesting him to teach political economy at the one-month central school in November 1974.....	239
Appendix 7.	<i>Résumé d'activité du militant</i> (to be completed by all applicants to the central school in the 1970s).....	240
Appendix 8.	Tracts designed by the central school students (17.10.1988 - 3.2.1989).....	241
Appendix 9.	" <i>Menu de clôture</i> " of the four-month central school 17.10.1988 - 3.2.1989.....	242
Appendix 10.	Invitation to " <i>ApéroStroïka</i> " by the students of the four-month central school in December 1989	242

Appendix 11.	Etienne Fajon during his interview 13.9.1991, at 2 place du Colonel-Fabien, Paris.....	243
Appendix 12.	Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne, June 1991	243
Appendix 13.	Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne, June 1991	244
Appendix 14.	Roland Leroy, editor-in-chief of <i>L'Humanité</i> , and the author during a study excursion of the central school students to the newspaper's offices 19.6.1991	244
Appendix 15.	<i>"Des élèves heureux"</i> of the one-month central school 20.6.1991	245
Appendix 16.	Lunch break at the Ecole nationale, 20.6.1991	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY		246

INTRODUCTION

*"Comme la vie est singulière, changeante!
Comme il faut peu de chose
pour vous perdre ou vous sauver!"*

Guy de Maupassant
(*"La Parure"*)

Aims of the study

This work focuses on one particular aspect of the decline of the French Communist Party, namely the PCF's *political education system as a factor in the perpetuation of the Party's conservatism 1945-90*. The aim of this investigation is to ascertain to what extent the influence exercised by the central control and direction of the political education of successive generations of party cadres reinforced the French Communist Party's general reluctance to change and thus contributed to the Party's decline. Its thesis is that by the skilful utilisation of the Party's organisational principle of democratic centralism, and by the systematic use of its political training system, which aimed to produce politically committed and ideologically sound cadres and militants for the application of democratic centralism, the communist leadership ensured the availability of more or less "obedient clones" who would perpetuate the conservative outlook of their superiors. To illustrate this argument the thesis provides an analysis of the party's system of political education, its content, its methods and the people involved, namely the students and teachers who worked within that system.

Origins of the study

The decline of the French Communist Party (PCF) formed an important factor in French politics in the 1980s, one which was addressed by a number of serious studies in both English and French.¹ These contemporary historians and sociologists of the French Communist Party appeared to focus almost exclusively on four main contributory causes of the Party's decline, i.e. the transformation of French socio-economic structures since the late 1960s; institutional factors (i.e. presidentialism resulting in particular from the 1962 constitutional reform, and bipolarisation which

involved the creation of alternative governing alliances likely to be harmful to the PCF); the rise of the French Socialist Party from 1974 onwards; and the sharp degradation of the image of the Soviet Union in French opinion, particularly since the 1970s. All studies also agreed that the Party itself, namely the leadership, must bear responsibility for its own failures in an area where it was supposed to excel, namely that of politics, strategy and tactics, but where it undisputedly had let down *le peuple communiste*.

A review of these sources revealed that, albeit to varying degrees, they only told part of the story. As all these studies had focused on the same set of causes, they had failed to generate alternative explanations but had merely produced confirming evidence and, naturally, no surprises. They were in fact “perpetuating” themselves - just like the Communist Party leadership - and arriving at a kind of *impasse* by simply expressing their criticism of the role of the leadership. There seemed to be a singular unconcern with the reasons or mechanisms behind the leadership’s motives and behaviour. There was also a lack of analysis of the leadership’s ability to exercise its will in situations of serious internal conflict and against a background of angry challenge from disappointed party members. In this sense existing research on the PCF’s marginalisation has given a restricted and unsatisfactory picture of the Party’s rapid decline since it describes rather than studies the problem. It was therefore more important to consider the problem from within than from without. Some authors² noted that the Party’s organisational principle of democratic centralism, was the one crucial factor which enabled the leadership to retain its power in the face of much internal opposition and anxiety. Yet none had undertaken the task of explaining how this organisational principle functioned or of linking it to analyses of the internal dynamics of the PCF itself.

There did in fact exist a number of significant studies of both the theory and practice of democratic centralism.³ The “unhealthy” aspects of democratic centralism were spelled out with a particular clarity by Naudy and Lavau; it was in fact the analyses of these two authors that led me to search for other accounts written by former PCF members. At this stage, the subject of party training began to crop up with some regularity.⁴

As I delved more deeply into the literature dealing with the PCF's internal life, I also came across the famous Communist "counter-community" (or counter-society) phenomenon described first by Annie Kriegel and then taken up by Roland Tiersky and Irvine Wall,⁵ all of whom recognised that the French Communist movement constituted a "community within society". They saw this community as an alternative mini-society that took care of the material needs and cultural aspirations of its members and provided them and their families with the necessary forms of diversion. A closer examination of this aspect of *political socialisation* also revealed the extreme vastness of the area to be studied. Any in-depth investigation would have to include the Party's youth and student organisations, women's organisations, the Peace Movement, communist-dominated trade unions, the Workers' Sport movement, the communist press and publishing firms, the diverse communist-dominated cultural organisations, and various types of other front organisations (war veterans, pensioners, tenants, etc.).

The early stages of the research thus revealed two potential sources which could be considered in any investigation which sought to explain the PCF leadership's reluctance to change. Discussions with a former member of the Finnish Communist Party (SKP) led in turn to a recognition of the potential significance of the party's own political education system. He emphasised the importance of political training at the party's central school, Sirola Opisto (Sirola College) in the maintenance of the Party's ideological discipline and internal cohesion: a primary task of the SKP's political education system had always been to make the theoretical understanding of revolutionary practice the common property of all members, and to achieve this goal, it was necessary to train party cadres who in turn would "educate" the broadest possible circle of party members, thus creating a mechanism of control of the "communist person". Further research, including interviews with two former SKP leaders, Aarne Saarinen (party chairman 1966-82) and Arvo Aalto (general secretary 1969-84, party chairman 1984-88), and with Sirola's last principal, Ilkka Tervonen (1990)⁶, suggested that a similar importance might be attributed to the political education system of the PCF. It soon became apparent that this was an under-researched area, little touched upon save by Annie Kriegel who described the PCF's political school network in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷

Sources and method

Having narrowed down my primary area of interest, the next problem was that of identifying and locating sources of primary information and archival material. Virtually no materials were available either in UK university libraries or the *Archives Nationales* in Paris. Letters to scholars concerned with the PCF also generated no response. By chance, a television review published in *Le Monde* (28.1 - 29.1.1990) referred to a documentary which focused on the PCF's counter-community and included an interview with a long-time party activist and former central school student Robert Charles. Although only the name of his village was given, I wrote to request an interview. A response came from his son, Jean Charles, a professor at the University of Besançon, a PCF historian and himself a former student and teacher of the Party's central schools. After checking my credentials he provided a list of archives and also personal introductions to the former secretary of the Paris federation, Jean Argelès, and a former PCF senator and a Central Committee member, Marcel Rosette, who had been the director of the Central School in 1956-62. These contacts led in turn to others, and I was thus able to begin the task of charting the area from the dissidents' point of view, both by reference to documentary sources and semi-structured interviews.

The range of available sources was extended by making personal contact, via the Portsmouth Trades Council's exchange programme with Caen, with the CGT delegate, Thierry Lepaon, a member of the PCF's federal committee in Calvados and one of Georges Marchais' bodyguards at the annual *Fête de l'Humanité*. He took an interest in my research and facilitated a visit to the Party's *Ecole nationale* in Draveil (Essonne), as well as the opportunity to carry out local interviews in Caen amongst party members who had been to party schools or taught in them. He was also instrumental in providing access to the PCF's headquarters and archives in *Colonel-Fabien* in Paris. This preliminary research⁸ indicated the availability of a wide variety of sources which would permit the reconstruction and analysis of the development of the party education system and an assessment of its significance.

The most important archives relating to the project were located mainly through recommendations. The crucial discovery was that of the central school archives at the

Ecole nationale: these records, relating to the student population and the functioning of the Party's central schools, had never previously been tapped. I was also permitted unfettered access to the PCF's Central Committee and *Service central de documentation* at Colonel-Fabien and supplied with statistical information, teaching programmes and general and historical information relating to the political training system and its functioning. At the *Institut de recherches marxistes* in Paris I found teaching programmes, text books, correspondence and reviews. *La Bibliothèque marxiste de Paris* made available its complete collection of *Cahiers du communisme* and *L'Humanité* and other party publications. The comprehensive general archives of *L'Humanité* turned out to be useful for checking dates and events. *Archives Marty* at the CRHMSS of University of Paris were particularly important in the task of researching the interwar and immediate postwar periods. In addition, many researchers and private individuals finally succumbed to my relentless mailing and phone calls and allowed me access to their own archives (see Bibliography, p. 245).

Apart from documentary analysis, the methodology was based heavily on extensive interviews with people who had personal experience and knowledge of the party training system (both dissidents and party activists) either as students, teachers, directors or *responsables du secteur éducation* (see Bibliography, p. 245). These interviews yielded much valuable information as to the everyday life and functioning of the party schools, the activities of students and teachers, as well as the content and changes in teaching programmes following congress resolutions and decisions and general shifts (or sharp reversals) of party strategy in the wake of national and international political events. They also made it possible to establish further contacts with others who had experience of the party education system. As a consequence, several former students and teachers either gave or lent their personal course material (study programmes, course "outlines" or *schémas*, personal notes, books, etc.) ranging from 1939 to 1990.

Archival and interview information⁹ received from members and ex-members of the Party revealed that most members of the then Central Committee and Political Bureau (1990-92) had in fact attended one or more party schools; moreover, about a quarter of the Central Committee members of the early 1990s had been former students of one

particular central school director between 1962 and 1966.¹⁰ A sociological study by Marie-Claire Lavabre¹¹, concerning the cadres of the Paris Federation (the country's most important federation) in 1977 had also revealed that only 15 per cent of the cadres had not attended a party school.

I also prepared a detailed ten-page questionnaire intended for past and present party school students. The questionnaire was checked and revised by Jean Charles from the University of Besançon. The intention was to distribute it to about 100 people (with the Party's agreement). I also sent the questionnaire to about 20 party "dissidents", and used it as a basic framework in conjunction with personal interviews. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect statistical data and authentic recollections about the students' "learning experience", and to provide a basis for follow-up interviews. This objective turned out to be too optimistic: only 10 questionnaires were in fact returned, and consequently the data gleaned from them could not be used as extensively as originally planned. However, the replies that were received confirmed some general concepts regarding student motivation and expectations, and once again provided further leads.

In order to gain a comparative methodological dimension I examined the possibility and usefulness of including a chapter about the political training systems of other Communist Parties, namely the SKP, the CPGB and the CPSU. The Finnish aspect had already been covered to some extent in my article published in 1990 (see above). I then located and inspected the archives of the CPGB, and began to work on the material I unearthed. However, the extent of the already available material and that concerning the Soviet dimension, plus the unknown quantity of the inaccessible information (in the USSR) soon made the unworkability of this plan apparent. One positive aspect of this effort, however, was that my investigation of the Soviet political education system (1920-70) enabled me to demonstrate to what extent the other communist parties had used it as a model.

Contextualisation

Once I had located and assembled the primary and archival materials relevant to my subject, I next had to address the complex problem of adequate contextualisation. It would be pointless to discuss the development and role of the PCF's political education system without giving some background concerning the political socialisation process and wider party political context (the PCF's contemporary history plus theoretical and intellectual aspects). First of all, then, it was therefore necessary to investigate literature concerning political socialisation as a means of incorporating people into the political culture. Particularly useful for the general background were the studies by Rush¹² who describes how individuals in a given society become acquainted with the political system, explains the purpose of political socialisation and defines the various processes by which people learn about politics; and by Kavanagh¹³ who analyses the debate on the primacy and recency schools (i.e. the critical period of socialisation). According to Kavanagh, advocates of the primacy school underline the importance of childhood whereas adherents of the recency theory emphasise the on-going socialisation (and resocialisation) processes which span a person's entire life cycle and relate to his/her experiences. Like Kavanagh, Dawson and Prewitt¹⁴ also see political socialisation as a continuous learning process which contributes to the development of the 'political self'; their analyses focus on some direct and indirect methods of political learning. Durham Hollander¹⁵ also discusses the purpose, content and means of political socialisation and highlights the political training of party cadres and the fundamental principles of the Soviet party education system whereas Holmes¹⁶ identifies the various processes of political socialisation and provides an analysis of the agencies and methods involved in *purposive socialisation*, the process with which this study is concerned. The effects of political education under a totalitarian system are described by Propper Mickiewicz¹⁷ who gives an excellent description of the early days of the Soviet political education system on which most other communist parties modelled their own training. Her in-depth investigation is complemented by the detailed studies by Katz¹⁸ and Kenez¹⁹ on political training and mass mobilisation in the Soviet Union. In the case of Communist Parties operating in Western democracies, the parties had to overcome the effects of socialisation in the *dominant* culture. In this respect, the work of Almond²⁰ gave me a valuable insight into the motivations, tensions and expectations of party members as

well as the psychological pressures placed upon them; these insights are supplemented by Meyer's²¹ detailed analyses of the various stages in the complete training process of the Communist cadre, the finely drawn portraits of seasoned communists and in particular, the portrait of the "ideal militant" (see Chapter 2) which was the desired end result of all communist education programmes. A special mention must be made in this context of Kriegel's²² remarkable illustration of the psycho-social processes in the development of the French Communist militant during the training period. The various descriptions and analyses concerning the functioning of the education process clearly called for an explanation as to the reasons and motivation for all this toil and effort. Our underlying argument concerning the supreme importance of political education in the process of political socialisation within the context of this study was indeed further strengthened by the enlightening studies by Gaxie,²³ Offerlé²⁴ and Derville & Croisat²⁵ who have written extensively on the motivations of party activists and the system of rewards (material, psychological, symbolic) which mass parties with vast, rigid hierarchical structures have had to adopt in order to retain their following. Finally, Maurice Thorez's autobiography *Fils du peuple*, the PCF's own publications in *Cahiers du communisme*, and the sociologist Bernard Pudal²⁶ further refine the picture of the "communist person" within the framework of the French Party.

Furthermore, to provide an adequate historical context I reviewed the vast body of studies devoted to the PCF's history. These studies are too numerous to mention here in their entirety (see Bibliography) but there were a number of works whose interpretations I found particularly useful. Adereth,²⁷ Brunet,²⁸ Courtois & Lazar,²⁹ Bell & Criddle³⁰ and Ysmal³¹ provide general and objective accounts of the PCF's doctrine, electoral performance, leadership and political role from the Party's foundation to present day. Johnson³² gives a detailed chronological analysis of the dilemmas, tensions and divisions confronting both the PCF and PS during the period of the Left Unity. For the preceding periods, there are the informative and extensive studies by Tiersky (with his interpretations of the PCF's four principal roles)³³, Wall³⁴ and Mortimer.³⁵ A parallel study of the communist parties of Italy, France and Spain by Lange and Vannicelli³⁶ provides an abundance of specific data and documents. The PCF's side is given in the unusually (for the PCF) lively - although rather uncritical - study by the party historian Roger Martelli (a former central school teacher and

member of the CC).³⁷ Finally, there is the monumental work by Robrieux,³⁸ an indispensable guide into the workings and chronology of the PCF (Part IV is particularly rich in biographical detail and party records) despite the well known criticism³⁹ that Robrieux's *oeuvre* tends to rely excessively on private oral sources and psychological analyses. Since I proceeded on the assumption that most readers interested in the subject would already be familiar with much of the detail and since it was not my intention to produce yet another *Histoire du PCF*, I have attempted to sketch in enough descriptive information in each chapter to provide a sufficient backdrop for my particular subject but not to swamp it in too much narrative. I hope that this balance has been achieved.

The virtual absence of previous scholarly investigation of the PCF's political education system confirmed the belief that my study would indeed fill a major gap. Only one work had dealt with the establishment of the Party's training schools, namely Danielle Tartakowsky's doctoral thesis *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33*,⁴⁰ which was completed in 1977. Bernard Pudal's book, *Prendre parti* (1989), also started life as a doctoral thesis, and although it mainly deals with the PCF's *groupe dirigeant* in the 1934-39 period, it also provides valuable information about the communist party training system during that time. The PCF's Education Sector in Paris also confirmed that the postwar period had never been systematically researched, and that its records concerning party education at the *Service central de documentation* (Colonel-Fabien) and at the *Ecole nationale* had not been exploited to that end. It was therefore clear that the subject was more than ripe for an in-depth investigation.

The Working Hypothesis

The argument of this study will be developed in six chapters. To set the scene, Chapter 1 provides an overview of the contemporary decline of the French Communist Party and an examination of the exogenous causes to which the decline has traditionally been attributed, and which have generally been thought of as being beyond the Party's control. It also introduces the element of the role of the party leadership.

Chapter 2 examines the process involved in the moulding of a communist party activist and aims to establish the vital importance of political education in the process of political socialisation in the context of our study. First, we will define the main agents of political education and the methods used to effect this process under a totalitarian regime (in this case, the Soviet Union). This will be followed by an in-depth examination of political education as *one* element in the process of political socialisation in Western Communist parties. It will be argued that, within this process, the formal training system was in fact the refining touch which was applied on a select group of people who were earmarked for special functions and higher responsibilities within the party and its mass organisations. We shall also examine the function of scientific Marxism as the “academic” element in the communist education system which was used to provide the training programmes with the required weight and scientific importance. This “moulding process” had an end product, namely the fully trained communist cadre. The principal qualities, characteristics and function in the party of such cadres will also be defined in this chapter. Finally, we will take a closer look at the “ideal cadre” who would set a shining example to successive generations of cadres of the French Communist Party. The portrait of the “ideal militant” is also intended to contribute to our understanding of one aspect of the PCF’s decline, since the criteria for the model cadre remained frozen in history for much too long.

The historical origins of the PCF’s political education system and its development during the interwar period following the split in Tours in 1920 constitute the principal theme for Chapter 3. We first examine the muddled beginnings of party training in the pre-bolshevisation period 1920-24; much of this account is drawn from the thesis of Danielle Tartakowsky (see above). We also discuss the Comintern-imposed bolshevisation programme and the ensuing internal chaos in the PCF, which greatly hampered the introduction of a systematic and well organised national training system. As a result, most of the higher party training took place in the Soviet Union in the International Lenin School. However, once the PCF’s ideological purity and working-class domination of the leadership had been achieved the Party was able to devote itself to the important task of giving to the political education system the basic shape, structures and stability that were by then required for the training of the members of a “mass party” of the kind which the PCF had become in the second half of the 1930s.

This rigid training format would subsequently be maintained for close to 60 years. It will be noted that already, coupled with democratic centralism, the newly-created party education system was developing into an excellent tool for preserving the predominance and authority of the working-class leadership.

The entire political training network of the PCF perished during the Second World War. However, as the PCF rapidly became a major force in French politics in the immediate postwar period, the leadership had to act swiftly to relaunch the education system in order to train the huge influx of new members to the Party. An examination of the postwar period, an era which was successful for the PCF both in terms of electoral glory and the rapid growth of the education system, provides a point of departure for Chapter 4. The second section of this chapter focuses on the period from the beginning of the Cold War to the 1956 Khrushchev report and the end of the Thorezian era. It was during this period that the PCF found itself in the bizarre situation of total political isolation whilst still being France's biggest party in electoral terms. It will be shown that the role of the Party's resurrected political education system was vital in maintaining the morale and motivation of party members, militants and cadres; it also contributed to the strengthening of communist identity and, above all, continued to constitute an effective mechanism for safeguarding the leadership's authority at a difficult time in the PCF's history.

Chapter 5 outlines the development of the political education system during the animated and challenging period 1965-80, which saw first the birth and then the death of the Common Programme of the French Left. We first examine the training system as seen by the directors of the central school. There will also be an analysis of the study programmes in the context of three main themes of the era, i.e. the shifts in relations between the alliance parties; the role of the working class in the PCF and the Party's specific identity as the party of the working class; and the effects of these changes on the PCF-CPSU relations during the alliance phase. Investigation of the previously unexplored archives of the *Ecole nationale* enables us to furnish more accurate details concerning the student population of the central school during the 1974-80 period. Students' own accounts of their "personal school experience" also provide first-hand information about the daily life in party schools. We shall show that, while it had

proven to be an excellent mechanism for control in the past, the PCF's political education system was now developing flaws. Controlled as it was by a cautious leadership, by the end of the 1970s it was becoming an obstacle to the modernisation of the Party. It was clearly unable to meet the needs of a new type of student and thus could not fulfill its aim of political socialisation.

The accelerated and remorseless decline of the PCF in 1981-90 forms the setting for the sixth and final chapter of this study. It begins with an assessment of the response of the planners of the education programmes to the national and international events of this period and to the four party congresses. With the PCF's strategy in tatters after the break-up of the Left Union and the brief and confusing spell of communist participation in government, this was no easy task. We will also continue our examination of the now shrinking student population in the Party's central schools and compare the general trends with those that had emerged in 1974-80. Finally, just as we had begun our study with the "identikit" of the ideal cadre, so we shall conclude by investigating the itinerary and "personal learning experience" of a modern communist militant in the communist education system 60 years after that system had been originally set up, and by describing our own experience of the PCF's central training school in Draveil in the early 1990s. In this way we demonstrate how many of the political training procedures had remained anchored in the past, and how the PCF's education system was blatantly being used as a brake on change. It had thus become one further manifestation of the Party's inflexibility and conservatism, and a factor in its apparently unrelenting decline.

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CHAPTER 1

THE DECLINE OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY

"Pour la première fois depuis 1934, l'avenir de la France est imaginable sans un Parti communiste".¹

The dramatic decline of the French Communist Party (PCF) in the 1980s, which actually preceded the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989-91, was a remarkable development in French politics given the important role that the PCF had played in France so long. In the account which follows we start by examining the main causal factors to which the PCF's decline is generally attributed and which, to a certain extent, have been beyond the Party's control. The first of these is the transformation of French socioeconomic structures and in particular, the changes in the French working class, over the last thirty years; secondly, there are the institutional factors, namely presidentialism and bipolarisation of French political life; thirdly, we have the strategy of the French Socialist Party, led by François Mitterrand, to redress the balance of forces on the left; and fourthly, we look at the deterioration of the Soviet image in French opinion and the consequent condemnation of the close links between the French Communists and the Soviet Union.

Another perspective on the process of communist marginalisation in French society will be proposed: this perspective will focus on the party leadership and the extent of *its own* responsibility in the process of decline. At the end of this examination of the decline of the PCF, we will develop the thesis that by skilfully utilising the Party's organisational principle, democratic centralism, and by making systematic use of its political training system aimed at producing politically committed and ideologically sound militants and cadres for the application of democratic centralism, the communist leadership ensured the availability of more or less "obedient clones" who would perpetuate the conservative outlook of their superiors.

The transformation of socioeconomic structures in France

*"Le Parti communiste est comme un chanteur qui vieillit avec son public de fidèles mais sans les renouveler."*²

The PCF's entire action and identity have always been based on two principles, both of which determine the mobilisation of a specific clientele.³ The first principle is the historic conflict between social groups, the class struggle. In this sacred struggle of the working class against its exploitation by capitalism, the Communist Party has valiantly placed itself in the avant-garde of the proletariat which it embodies. The second principle stems from the first one: the revolutionary class *par excellence*, namely the working class, must occupy the dominant and leading role in the class struggle and within the revolutionary party, it is the working class which must form the majority and occupy the leading positions. As Ysmal puts it, it therefore follows that the PCF must preserve its working-class identity.⁴

However, the PCF today represents only a small proportion of the working class which itself has changed composition and undergone decline.⁵ In the context of major industrial upheaval, the enormous changes which have taken place within the working class - in particular since the 1980s - produced in workers a profound crisis of identity which could not but be reflected in its most illustrious representative, the Communist Party. A 1987 survey shows that 50% of workers thought that they "belonged to a social class" as against 74% in 1976; amongst 56% of all those who believed that they belonged to a social class, only 26% thought they were working-class compared with 40% in 1976.⁶ According to an earlier SOFRES survey between 1975 and 1982, "the percentage of French people who felt they belonged to the working class sank from 27% to 22%, whilst in the same period the share of the working class in the active population fell from 36% to 31%".⁷

This loss of the *centralité ouvrière* - the belief that the working class should play a central and dominant role in society and politics - was further aggravated by the rise of other well educated and highly qualified social categories in the tertiary sector (clerical workers, managers, technicians, liberal professions) as well as the increase in the

numbers of *couples mixtes*.⁸ Moreover, the young people, already noticeably absent from the communist electorate for years, were becoming completely indifferent to ideologies in general; Lazar explains how “[*La jeunesse*] elle n’est ni procommuniste, ni anticommuniste, mais, tout simplement, indifférente au communisme.”⁹

Furthermore, the traditional political representation of the working class reached a crisis point during the 1980s. The traditional working class saw its numbers shrink fast: its more qualified members were becoming middle class; its older members were hit by unemployment as industrial development by-passed their skills; and its least qualified members (immigrants, women, non-qualified young people) were left without any protection.¹⁰ The outcome was that, without even really noticing it, the PCF lost its social base and as Courtois points out, it was this loss that destabilised the entire communist “ecosystem”, i.e., the Party’s firm implantation in French society which centred largely around communist municipalities.¹¹

The above analyses fit in neatly with the observations of Oliver Schwartz,¹² who has identified three main long-term constants of the image of the working class in the communist vision. First, the PCF never changed its perception of the working class as “une classe dépossédée, un adversaire infatigable et inconciliable du capitalisme”, both in economic and social terms; this element of communist thought did not change even when the theory of *paupérisation* could hardly be considered to correspond to the realities of the consumer society.

The PCF’s second *idée fixe* was that the working class constituted “une classe radicale, dure”, in eternal conflict with the social system. In truth, the average worker of the 1970s and 1980s wanted nothing to do with the legendary *refus social* of the proletariat. Finally, the Party continued to hold on to the notion of family and moral conformity of the working class and completely ignored the modern trends in sexuality and role-sharing. The PCF’s vision was further distorted by the idea of the working class forming - as if by its very nature - a coherent and class-conscious unity, able and willing to adopt systematic and radical measures advocated by the Party. Schwartz concludes: “Il faut bien dire que, quand on a un peu trop consommé du marxisme simplifié, il devient extrêmement difficile d’imaginer que des ouvriers ne luttent pas pour leur émancipation,

*que l'identité de classe ne soit pas le sens de tous leurs actes, qu'ils ne soient pas à tout moment partie prenante d'un vaste sujet collectif et révolutionnaire."*¹³

Finally, the PCF's total divorce from contemporary social realities was confirmed by its return to orthodox "workerism", the exaggerated emphasis placed on the exclusive and dominant role of the working class. At the 27th Congress in 1990, 94% of the party cadres were still agreed that the *lutte de classes* was a topical theme and 84% believed that the PCF was the party of the working class.¹⁴ Unfortunately for the Party, a more affluent working class had no interest in these strong workerist traditions; even the new watch words "*la classe ouvrière élargie*" and "*le travailleur collectif*" which were adopted to generate new members from the non-communist working class had no success.

Therefore, the Party was confronted with a social dilemma to which it did not respond. It also faced a number of institutional obstacles highlighted by political explanations concerning the Party's decline.

Institutional obstacles

*"Le Parti communiste est en somme psychologiquement interdit d'élections présidentielles."*¹⁵

Certainly the Communists also suffered from the damaging effects of the institutional framework, namely "presidentialism", as inaugurated by General de Gaulle, the bipolarisation of French political life resulting from the 1962 constitutional reform which created a directly elected, powerful presidency; and the two-ballot majoritarian (*scrutin majoritaire*) electoral system used in most legislative elections.

The most important institutional cause of bipolarisation was the presidentialisation of the regime after 1958.¹⁶ The Constitution of 1958 embodied de Gaulle's views of a strong executive and a reduced role for the National Assembly, although de facto presidential dominance came only through precedents set by de Gaulle himself during the early years of the Fifth Republic. This led to a natural reduction of parliamentary

powers, which in turn deprived the Communists of an effective political base since they were now prevented from obstructing legislative work and provoking ministerial crises as they had during the Fourth Republic.

The reform of the 1958 Constitution in 1962 completed the transition to presidential dominance. Until then, the president had been elected by an electoral college but henceforth, the presidential election was to be carried out by universal suffrage. This, although not conferring new functions, privileges or powers upon the president, nevertheless accorded him an important new power and status, that of the *élu du peuple*. It was widely *assumed*, therefore, that the democratic legitimacy of the presidential office could not be challenged by any other democratic institutions.

Moreover, the presidential election procedure further intentionally polarised public preference: according to its mechanism, only the two best placed candidates from the first round could proceed to the second ballot if no candidate had obtained an absolute majority at the first ballot. But presidential dominance was not written into the Constitution: for a strong presidency to develop, it had to coincide with a loyal parliamentary majority (which was the case until 1986 when the first *cohabitation* between a president and parliamentary majority of differing convictions took place; as a result of this, President Mitterrand's powers were immediately reduced). Given that presidential dominance depended on a sympathetic and solid parliamentary majority and that no single party was capable of achieving such a majority alone, alliances became indispensable.

Institutional forces have clearly contributed to the decline of the PCF since presidentialism and bipolarisation caused a loss of dominance of the Communist Party in favour of its more moderate socialist rival. Presidential elections have always been harmful to the health of the PCF. First, public opinion in these elections tends to focus on personality, leadership qualities and capacity to govern - areas where the communist candidates are weak - more than on programmes and ideologies which have always been the Communist Party's main campaign themes.¹⁷ Moreover, the personalisation of the campaigns and the attention of the media to personalities in the 1980s left the communist candidates on their starting blocks insofar as any American-style packaging

of the candidates was concerned. Secondly, the two-ballot electoral system means that a communist candidate advocating radical change would never stand a chance of being elected on the second round against a right-wing candidate, as the battle is usually over centrist votes and would not favour the more extreme of the left candidates.¹⁸

Successive opinion polls have shown that only a very small minority of the French nation would have preferred a communist president: in 1979, for example, when the PCF was still attracting a solid 21% of the votes, only 14% of the French questioned by *Le Nouvel Observateur* opinion poll admitted their preference for a communist candidate.¹⁹

Thirdly, the precedent set by the PCF's support for François Mitterrand's joint left candidacy in 1965 and 1974 led to widespread use by communist voters of the *vote utile* at the first round even when the PCF did put up its own candidate (in 1981 and 1988; Jacques Duclos' 21.5% of the votes at the first ballot in 1969 was mainly due to the total lack of credibility of Gaston Defferre, the socialist candidate). The outcome of the *vote utile* meant a considerably lower score for the PCF and with hindsight, it is easy to see the communist leadership's serious tactical error in completely eliminating the Party from the highest election in the country.

Neither was the PCF's situation vis-à-vis the presidential election facilitated by the fact that, throughout the Fifth Republic, the Party has criticised the "undemocratic and monarchial" nature of the presidential function.²⁰ The communist situation was therefore paradoxical: the PCF's presidential candidate had to convince the French electorate of his personal credibility and that of his political programme whilst, at the same time, the Party was still questioning the president's role. André Lajoinie in 1988 therefore became *un présidentiable antiprésidentiel*, as the PCF defended its decision by claiming that this was the only way to check right-wing presidentialism. This claim was indeed fundamental in order to preserve the PCF's ideological integrity but it caused further confusion among the potential communist electorate.

As for the electoral system for legislative elections, that, too, carried serious implications for the PCF. As we shall see below, the two-ballot system threatened the

Communists with virtual elimination at the second round if they did not conclude electoral alliances with the non-communist left. However, alliances and coalitions with the Socialists did not turn out to the advantage of the Communist Party. Obligated to moderate its programme and make doctrinal concessions (while its rival radicalised its platform and gained left credentials), the PCF lost its traditional image as the party of protest. Alliance strategy implied the creation of a *governing* alliance with a credible and electorally convincing programme which all combined rather unsatisfactorily with the Communist Party's traditional tribune role as the articulator of protest. Bell and Criddle rightly point out that, in the multi-party system under the Fourth Republic, "mere protest articulation sufficed to deliver a regular 25% of the vote to the Communist Party";²¹ however, under the new system of the Fifth Republic something more concrete had to be proposed. Moreover, the *scrutin majoritaire* tended to favour the dominant and popular parties with a solid block of support on left or right *plus* the ability to attract the centre; however, it penalised weak, isolated and less popular "outsiders".²² The legislative election system also led to the practice of the *vote utile* at the second ballot: whilst at the first ballot the voters "chose" according to their personal convictions, at the second ballot they "eliminated" and were thus often "forced" to vote for a less-preferred candidate. Until the break-up of the left union, first-ballot socialist voters were gradually adapting to voting communist at the second ballot, but the *transfert des voix* started to suffer as a result of the worsening relations between the Socialists and Communists and was working virtually in *sens unique* after 1978.

In the final analysis, however, it is important to note that - although there is no doubt that both the legislative and presidential elections discriminate against the PCF and, consequently, reflect negatively on its image, morale, credibility and strategy - the fact remains that the Communists' electoral slide has been constant in virtually all elections (see Table 1.1 below) since 1981 (even when proportional representation was used as in 1986).

TABLE 1.1 The PCF's electoral performance 1945-1997 (%)

1945	26	1973	21.4
1946 (June)	25.7	1978	20.7
1946 (November)	28.6	1981 (presid.)	15.5
1951	26.9	1981	16.1
1956	25.9	1986	9.6
1958	19.2	1988 (presid.)	6.7
1962	21.9	1993	9.1
1967	22.5	1995 (presid.)	8.7
1968	20.0	1997	9.94
1969 (presid.)	21.5		

The Socialist element

*"Ma grande chance historique, c'est l'incroyable médiocrité intellectuelle des dirigeants communistes. Regradez-les: Marchais, Plissonnier, Laurent et les autres. Il n'y en a pas un pour racheter l'autre. On peut les manipuler comme on veut. Ils sont tous plus bêtes les uns que les autres. Toutes leurs réactions sont prévisibles. Ils sont programmés. Si j'avais eu en face de moi des responsables du niveau de ceux du parti communiste italien, les choses auraient été beaucoup plus difficiles pour moi."*²³

In order to evaluate the part played by the Socialist Party under François Mitterrand in the political marginalisation of the PCF, we need to briefly outline the political background and the evolution of the balance of forces on the left.

After the break-up in 1947 of the "tripartite" coalition of Communists, Socialists and Christian Democrats, French politics came to be dominated by the division of the left which prevented any natural alternation of political power. Furthermore, the East-West schism at the international level condemned the PCF to virtual exclusion and isolation from political participation and positions of authority. However, as the PCF was the largest party in France in terms of organisation and membership (see Table 1.2 below), its sheer strength completely distorted the French political system during the Fourth Republic by propelling the centre towards the right and perpetuating the split of the left. The saying went that nothing could be done without the Communist Party and nothing could be done with it.

TABLE 1.2 The PCF's membership figures 1945-1987

1945	785 292	1964	340 000
1946	814 285	1966	341 000
1947	774 629	1967	350 000
1948	650 400	1969	380 000
1949	550 100	1970	380 000
1950	482 700	1971	375 000
1951	408 779	1972	390 000
1952	330 000	1973	410 000
1953	351 400	1974	450 000
1954	358 400	1975	491 000
1957	330 000	1978	520 000
1960	300 000	1984	380 000
1961	300 000	1985	352 000
1962	318 000	1986	340 000
1963	330 000	1987	330 000

Source: COURTOIS, S. & LAZAR, M., *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1995), p. 423.

Some major developments in the 1950s and 1960s in the international environment and on the French political scene changed the stalemate situation of the PCF. At the international level, the year 1956 marked a watershed: Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalinism and the subsequent strategy of peaceful coexistence opened up new possibilities for communist parties in Western Europe. In French politics, the return of General de Gaulle in 1958 had an immediate and catastrophic effect on the French left. The two institutional innovations of the Fifth Republic, namely the creation of a strong presidency on the one hand and the two-ballot voting system on the other, presented the divided left with a major challenge since success in both elections necessitated a strong alliance policy. The anti-European and anti-American foreign policy of General de Gaulle and his interest in developing relations with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc also contributed to the softening of the image of the hitherto "feared revolutionaries" by depriving them of some of the traditional communist themes of agitation.

It was against this background of political and electoral necessity that the Communists and Socialists concluded limited electoral deals for the 1962 legislative elections.²⁴ In 1965, the PCF agreed to support François Mitterrand as the left's joint presidential candidate against de Gaulle. Mitterrand's success in forcing de Gaulle to a second ballot established him as the de facto leader of the (still unofficial) united left opposition; however, it also set a dangerous precedent for all types of future elections with the *vote utile*. As a result of further efforts at unity, a "Joint Declaration" listing points of agreement and disagreement was signed by Mitterrand and Waldeck Rochet in February 1968. However, the Events of May 1968 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968 temporarily stopped the transition towards left union.

Nevertheless, Mitterrand's emergence as the leader of the new *Parti socialiste* at the Epinay congress in 1971 revived the Socialists following their disastrous electoral performances, and the renewal of their party apparatus and the radicalisation of their programme confirmed that the strategy of left unity and the pursuit of a programmatic deal with the Communists were on the agenda as before. After the publications of new programmes²⁵ and intensive negotiations in early 1972, the PCF and the PS together with a dissident wing of the Radical Party, *Mouvement des radicaux de gauche*, signed a common platform, *Programme commun de gouvernement*, and agreed on a nationally binding second-ballot electoral pact for the 1973 legislative elections (in which the united left got closer to its immediate post-war level of support: 46% of the vote in 1973 against 57% in 1946).

The euphoria of the moment disguised the quite different motives and expectations of the two main signatories. The PCF's aim was to use the Common Programme as a means of setting France "on the road to socialism" and, at the same time, to maintain the Communist Party as the leading force on the left. The Party also expected to make substantial gains, as in the 1936 Popular Front era. On the face of it, this optimism was justified as the united frontism of the 1930s and 1940s had served the PCF extremely well. But the 1970s presented an entirely new scenario: the anti-fascism of the 1930s and the prestige of the victorious Soviet Union of the 1940s were no longer playing a part and there was nothing new to replace them as a general rallying point. The intentions of the PS - and in particular of Mitterrand - justified the private fears of Marchais²⁶ and some other communist leaders that the revitalised Socialists intended to make full use

of the union to establish the PS as an alternative ideological force and focus to the PCF and carry out a complete *rééquilibrage de la gauche*.²⁷

The legislative elections of March 1973 provided the first test for the union. Although the PCF preserved its dominant position its percentage dropped by 1.2% (21.3%) compared with 1967 whilst the PS increased its share to 20.4%. The PCF's dilemma was further highlighted by the 1974 presidential election: President Pompidou died in office and the Communists had no choice but to accept Mitterrand for the second time as the joint candidate of the left. This again reinforced the threat of the *vote utile* for future elections, and despite the communist leadership's outward pleasure at Mitterrand's excellent performance, the seeds of discord between the partners had been sown and had fallen on fertile ground.

The PCF's 22nd Congress in 1976 was a certain turning point in its attempt to compete with the PS on ideological ground. The adoption of the notion of an original "democratic road to socialism" implied that the Party accepted existing democratic forms (parliament, etc.) and that the socialist revolution in France would not be a violent one. The PCF also officially abandoned the dictatorship of the proletariat in favour of "democratic socialism". Numerous other policy changes (for example, acceptance of party plurality and, by implication, "alternance", change of attitude towards intellectuals, and semantic changes in party practice) all came too suddenly and too late after decades of immobilism under Thorez. To add to the membership's confusion, much of the PCF's ideological cohesion was lost and the rapidity of changes considerably aggravated intra-party conflicts about strategy. As early as 1974, Jean-Pierre Chevènement had sounded a warning to the Communist Party: an alliance with the PS would oblige the Communists to be ideologically dynamic to survive. The problem was that despite the PCF's efforts, the Socialists always managed to be even more dynamic and by 1977 it was becoming clear that the PCF had failed to maintain its dominant position in the Left Union. Alarmingly, the PCF was also beginning to lose out to the PS on its traditional tribune clientele, the "defence of the *défavorisés*"; this was a clear indication to the leadership that the Party was jeopardising its distinctive identity. The leadership was also facing stiff opposition from the Party's anti-unitarian element, which placed additional constraints on the leaders' ability to modernise.

The updating of the Common Programme in view of the 1978 legislative elections became the major issue between the PCF and the PS: for the Socialists, the joint

programme now appeared too radical and restrictive whereas the more than 100 demands set down by the PCF constituted a significant radicalisation of the document. No common ground was found and the union of the left collapsed in a barrage of mutual bitterness and recriminations: as a result, the left lost the legislative elections which it was expected to win.²⁸ The public criticism of the PCF was accompanied by an unprecedented internal debate in the Party over intra-party democracy and practice: the result was a generalised revolt of the communist intellectuals which the PCF was unable to stem²⁹ and which was to have crucial consequences in that a great many of these united frontists left the PCF, whereas the “workerist” and “pro-Soviet” elements stayed. This development would leave an indelible mark on the PCF’s trajectory in years to come.

By the time of the 1981 presidential election the PCF still lacked a convincing strategy, alliance policy and new image.³⁰ Marchais’ tactical electoral engineering ensured that the PCF returned to government for the first time in 34 years in the most unfavourable conditions possible: an unprecedented socialist domination of the left (an absolute majority with 285 seats including *élus apparentés*) and an unprecedented electoral setback for the Communists (44 seats compared with 86 in 1978). The PCF found itself in the humiliating position of subordination to the PS: the latter had all the keys to power - presidency, premiership and parliament - without any particular necessity to rely on its partner, who was given four relatively junior ministries.³¹ In government the PCF had a difficult task: it had to prove it was up to its new responsibilities, and at the same time retain its traditional role of the *parti de luttes*. The leadership was issuing contradictory statements in an attempt to define these roles³² and had to resort to its *courroie de transmission*, the CGT, to “mobilise the masses” and keep the PS on its toes as regards its electoral promises. But the complications of the strategy which involved a leadership on the outside, criticising government policy, along with the communist ministers on the inside bound by *solidarité gouvernementale* became too much after the PS’s austerity U-turn in 1983.

The Communists withdrew into opposition, and soon afterwards, the PCF’s 25th Congress in February 1985 condemned the Common Programme as a purely negative and damaging experience and a major programmatic error. A new strategy, *Nouveau rassemblement populaire et majoritaire* with an emphasis on a popular movement failed to save the PCF at the 1986 legislative elections which produced the worst ever communist result during the Fifth Republic: 9.79% of the votes cast, just ahead of the

Front national and back at the 1924 level (9.5%). The PCF's election campaign themes - anti-cohabitationist and anti-socialist - and the Party's internal problems also contributed to the disaster which struck subsequently in the 1988 presidential election. The meagre 6.7% collected by André Lajoinie in the first ballot was the worst result at the polls in the Party's history (Pierre Juquin, the *renovateur* candidate, only received 2.1% of the vote). Thus the communist leadership's inability to handle its alliance strategy had left the Party disunited and broken on the eve of the extraordinary crisis of Communism in the East which, within a year, was to cast its shadow on the remains of communist credibility.

The Soviet factor

*"La situation du PCF n'a rigoureusement rien à voir avec la situation du PCUS. On continue la lutte!"*³³

Throughout most of its existence, the PCF consistently identified very closely with the international communist movement, dutifully followed the 21 conditions adopted at the Tours Congress and, more or less readily, subordinated its political aims to the Soviet policy of the day. The PCF's role as "an obedient servant of Moscow" (Annie Kriegel's expression) put it in an ambiguous position at home and earned it sarcastic nicknames such as *la fille aînée de l'Eglise communiste* and *le parti de l'étranger*, both expressions, which in the collective memory of the French caused extensive damage to the Communist Party.

As Wright points out, there were rare periods in the PCF's history when the CPSU's and the French Party's interests merged, as in the Popular Front era and the immediate post-Liberation period when it was "possible" for the PCF to be both pro-Soviet and patriotic.³⁴ Despite the French Communists' obvious subservience to the Moscow line, the relationship had its fair share of problems. Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 was not accepted by the Thorezian leadership (it was referred to as "*le rapport attribué à Khroushchev*" for a long time in party parlance and was not published in full by the PCF until 1982³⁵). In the 1960s the PCF increasingly - albeit sporadically - criticised acts of political repression in the Soviet Union such as the Daniel and Sinyavsky trial in 1966 and initially, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Yet, the real willingness of the PCF to distance itself from the Soviet Union did not take place until the 1970s and it

immediately cooled the fraternal relationship between the French and Soviet parties when Moscow did not approve of the French Communists' left alliance strategy at home.

During its short-lived flirtation with Eurocommunism, the PCF sought to disengage itself from the many aspects of Soviet influence by underlining its strategic independence in domestic matters and by severely criticising Soviet foreign and internal policy as well as the CPSU's imposition of uniform proletarian internationalism on the entire communist movement. Many party intellectuals in particular warmly welcomed the rapprochement with the Italian and Spanish parties. They were the supporters who were to experience the most painful feelings of disappointment in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Left Union in 1978 when the PCF leadership abruptly changed its *fusil d'épaule* and decided to return to the Soviet lap. At that point, a whole series of seemingly defiant actions followed: Georges Marchais made his famous statement of the Soviet bloc's *bilan positif* at the 23rd Congress in 1979;³⁶ the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was approved very publicly;³⁷ practically all criticism of Soviet reality came to a halt; and in general, relations with the Soviet Union were again strengthened and bilateral meetings were resumed. However, as Wright points out, the PCF did concede that the USSR "was not a model to be emulated" and continued its intermittent criticism of the violation of human rights. For most communist intellectuals the PCF's return to the fold was the final blow and many of them abandoned their affiliation to the Party after arduous political and ideological in-fighting with the leadership.³⁸

The arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev on the world scene had every chance of turning the tables to the PCF's advantage. The PCF publicly endorsed Gorbachev's reforms from the beginning, but the radicalisation of the perestroika and glasnost programme in 1987-88 created problems for the leadership: it was more than obvious that while Gorbachev "democratised", Marchais was busy "stalinising". Until then, the PCF had supported Gorbachev's international disarmament initiatives and was clearly in favour of his internal reforms concerning the Communist Party. In fact, according to the French communists, the USSR was, at last, taking note of the PCF's long-standing criticism concerning the lack of democracy in the Soviet Union since in the early days, perestroika and glasnost were "exactly the kind of thing" that the PCF slogan "*socialisme aux couleurs de la France*" had been advocating since 1976.³⁹ But Gorbachev's reforms revealed the backwardness and poverty of the Soviet society which the PCF had been trying to conceal; they also turned out to be considerably more far-

reaching and bolder than the Party had anticipated, and so the French Communists were forced to re-evaluate the whole situation. An additional problem for the PCF was that, as a declining and unpopular political force, it was becoming less and less useful to the CPSU.⁴⁰ The PCF, whilst ostentatiously approving perestroika and glasnost as far as the USSR was concerned, therefore preferred to retain an ambivalent wait-and-see attitude.

The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe left the PCF numb, and for a considerable time, the leadership still expected the situation to return to “normal”.⁴¹ The abortive Moscow coup in August 1991 revealed the full extent of the PCF’s dilemma and confusion. The leadership issued a most ambiguous declaration which stated that “*les conditions d’éviction de Mikhaïl Gorbatchev de ses responsabilités sont inacceptables*”; this was followed by severe criticism of perestroika which “had failed to tackle the problems of the Soviet Union”. The official “condemnation” was immediately contested by PCF dissidents: Charles Fiterman called the statement “*insuffisant et ambigu*” and refused to accept it.⁴² When the coup failed, the PCF was obliged to clarify its stand quickly.

But no amount of clarification and elucidation could paper over the cracks in the Party caused by this latest example of the leadership’s old inflexible line as the number of *contestataires* increased dramatically. The explanations given by the party hierarchy of what went wrong in the USSR and the Eastern bloc offered no new insight into party thinking. The predictable main argument was that the French Party had never known the full extent of the problems plaguing the socialist countries; what it did know it had never ceased to criticise loud and clear. The 27th Congress in 1990 reconfirmed and reinforced the party strategy: what had happened to socialism in the East and the USSR had “*rigoureusement rien à voir*” with the PCF. Consequently, the Party saw no reason to change the party name, strategy or doctrine. A need for new approaches and organisational methods was however admitted: the PCF’s remodelled approach would have to find a way between capitalism and bureaucratic socialism, the French idea of socialism, i.e. *socialisme à la française*, which was different from the socialism of existing or former socialist countries. The context and form were to be decided by the “people” themselves and would set the pace of the movement towards socialism without “*une grande théorie*” and its ready-made solutions.

The PCF-Russian connection is not of much practical significance today, but as the above analysis demonstrates, it was certainly one of the obvious reasons for the French

Communists' decline. With Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in the USSR, the revolutions of the Eastern Bloc and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation changed completely and the Soviet factor lost its relevance, leaving the PCF stupefied on the sidelines. However, what was still relevant was that the PCF lost important points by failing to respond to the "events" and the "new, brave Russia". Thus the Party's ill-formulated and ambiguous reactions to the Russian situation led to the final crumbling of any communist credibility as the public opinion's attitude towards the PCF was suddenly not so much anti-communist as simply a-communist.

The Communist Leadership

*"Il y a un élément de mystère ... dans la constitution de Sparte: les libres citoyens sont menés tyranniquement et l'acceptent."*⁴³

Thus far, the account given above of the decline of the PCF has focused on factors that have been, to a certain extent, beyond the control of the Party itself. We have seen that the political failures of the PCF had indeed solid exogenous causes, since the Party's socioeconomic fragility and political vulnerability represented factors which already threatened the Communists and jeopardised the PCF's existence as a meaningful political force. Moreover, the institutional framework fostered a relationship with the Socialists that clearly benefited the latter at the expense of the PCF. In addition, the Party's dogged and close identification with the Soviet Union had manifestly caused extensive damage to the credibility of the French Communists. There now remains the question of the extent to which the decline was conditioned or accelerated by internal factors which the Party, in principle, could have influenced. This leads us to examine matters concerning the party leadership and its own responsibility in this process of decline.

Some observers have maintained that the decline of the PCF was the ineluctable consequence of the convergence of the factors already discussed and that individuals only played a minor role. Others, on the contrary, contest this view and maintain that it was by no means logically preordained that the decline should take place on such an enormous scale and with such rapidity - virtually within one decade. Whilst not denying the cumulative effects of the adverse external elements in the Party's decline, the latter observers believe that, in the final analysis, it is the communist leadership which must

be seen as the main instrument in the further marginalisation of the Party: the leadership's ill-judged decisions and shifting strategies transformed a decline due to circumstances into a *débâcle à part entière*.⁴⁴ Therefore, the leadership's multiple mistakes must be seen as the subjective, endogenous cause of the Party's brutal decline in the 1980s.

In the section that follows we shall first examine the role of the party leadership in the face of the converging forces of the decline analysed above. It will be argued that the communist leadership pointedly refused to accept any responsibility for the Party's increasingly perilous predicament in the 1980s. It would also seem appropriate at this stage to consider the role of the PCF's long-time secretary-general, Georges Marchais, who presided over the Party during the entire period of this decline. Given the magnitude and extent of the decline during his reign, the political longevity of Marchais obviously needs an explanation. This leads us to examine the Communist Party's way of functioning, namely its organisational principle of democratic centralism. Analysis of the process of democratic centralism will show that the system, by allowing an ageing but powerful and dogged leadership to hold sway over the Party in the name of communist identity and ideological cohesion, rendered any process of change extremely difficult.

"Un syndicat des défavorisés"?

To what extent could the PCF, then, be considered as the "helpless victim" of the socioeconomic upheavals of post-industrial French society? Enormous changes had taken place in that society during the period under discussion: by the 1980s, class structures had become increasingly blurred and educational standards were rising; ideologies no longer seemed to hold any relevance as a new type of elector emerged, with a preference for individual choices and an interest in current as opposed to historical issues; the tertiary sector had developed at the expense of the traditional industrial sectors, so long the familiar stronghold of the communist movement. Was the PCF really fated to become "*un syndicat des défavorisés*"⁴⁵ and "a party of old people and nostalgics"?⁴⁶

In this particular area the PCF leadership's lack of strategies to deal with the changing society of France was nothing short of spectacular. Although the working class had been in numerical decline since the mid-1970s, the PCF still continued to recruit most of its

leadership from *la classe ouvrière*. This ineluctably led the leading organs to lose their grip on the party membership - and on reality. A closer examination of the party leadership and membership structures (see Table 1.3 below) provides an interesting opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the leadership insisted on the “social purity” of the Party’s higher organs. It also provides an illustration of the leadership’s total incomprehension - or unwillingness to comprehend - in the face of social change.

TABLE 1.3 The PCF’s social composition 1954 - 1979 (%)

	1954	1959	1966	1979
Male	79.8	78.1	74.5	64.3
Female	20.2	21.9	25.5	35.7
Under 25 years	10.2	5.6	9.4	11.8
26-40 years	35.6	38.5	33.1	39
Over 40 years	54.3	56.2	57.5	49.2
Workers	40.1	40.3	43.4	30.8
<i>Employés</i>			18.6	16.9
Technicians				3.8
Engineers & technicians			1.9	
<i>Instituteurs</i>	2	2.7		3.3
Teachers & Researchers			4.9	1.9
Retired				15.5

Source: COURTOIS, S. & LAZAR, M., *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1995), p. 424.

Courtois and Peschanski⁴⁷ have observed how, with the Party in decline, the famous homogeneity and uniformity of the PCF lost their meaning. Not only did these socioeconomic transformations affect the population in general, but the PCF also felt the impact since it had accumulated a mass of very diverse elements both in social terms and in terms of political generations and experiences. In the past, the Party's strong charismatic leaders - Cachin, Thorez, Duclos, Frachon, etc. - had skilfully managed to preserve a powerful communist identity (in this they were aided by the absence of serious left competition at the time). However, the Marchais generation was as patently unable to blend together the extremely heterogeneous elements of the Party as it was to adapt to the sociological changes which had taken place in France.

Courtois and Peschanski have identified a major imbalance in the social origins of the PCF which strongly contributed to the weakening of the Party and which was aggravated by the leadership's obstinate inflexibility. Since the 1980s, there had been a huge disequilibrium in the party structure between the entirely working-class leadership and the party apparatus which came to be increasingly dominated by middle-class members. This represented an enormous change from 50 years of fairly homogeneous structure in terms of membership, militants and leadership. Middle-class *employés* were now in the majority among the federal apparatuses but in the minority among congress delegates - and even more so among the vitally important first secretaries of the federations. The authors suggest that the blocking of the access of the white-collar workers to the highest posts had much to do with the crises of 1977-78, in which intellectuals mounted a serious opposition movement against the party leadership. Lazar⁴⁸ quotes some figures concerning working-class domination in the higher party organs: in the Central Committee, workers represented over 51% of the total members in 1945, over 45% in 1950 and still 49.6% in 1976 - this at a time when the proportion of workers in the active population was falling rapidly. The Politbureau (see Table 1.4, below) was dominated by working-class or peasant members (plus a considerable number of *employés* in the public sector - EDF, PTT, SNCF, etc.) until the 1970s when technicians and *professeurs agrégés* made their entry (the latter starting to push out the *instituteurs*). This development did reflect, to some extent, the sociological changes within the party membership and delegates in 1960-70; but as Lazar points out, the shifts in the leadership's sociological structure have only relative value since the real centres of decision-making remained firmly in the hands of working-class militants. The party secretariat in particular remained virtually watertight as far as non-working-class

penetration was concerned: for 45 years the majority of its members consisted of workers, peasants or *employés* (in 1970-79 there were only two *instituteurs* and one technician).⁴⁹

TABLE 1.4 The sociological composition of the PCF’S Politbureau 1947-1990

	1947	1956	1964	1970	1974	1979	1982	1987	1990
Workers	7	7	8	7	7	8	7	8	9
<i>Paysans</i>	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1
<i>Employés</i>	2	4	4	5	4	4	6	5	3
<i>Instituteurs</i>	1	2	1	2	2	0	0	1	2
Secondary School Teachers	1	2	1	1	4	4	4	3	2
ITC	0	0	1	1	2	3	3	3	2
Others	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	13	17	17	18	20	21	22	23	23

Source: LAZAR, M., *Maisons rouges* (Aubier, 1992), Table 15, p. 404.

Another important imbalance emerged between the political generations and the various levels of hierarchy within the Party. Courtois and Peschanski identified four political generations in the PCF in 1979: 59.1% (the majority) had joined the Party in 1972-79 in the heyday of the Left Union; most (55.7%) middle-level apparatchniks had joined in the aftermath of 1968 up to 1974; the leadership, however, still originated from the Thorez generation (77% of federation first secretaries in 1982 had joined before 1967); and finally, after 1979, a fourth generation, extremely hostile towards the PS, joined the Party after the collapse of the Common Programme.⁵⁰

Lazar, too, has analysed the leadership generations: his conclusion is that there was a discrepancy between the generations of the central leadership and those of the Party’s congress delegates. Between 1970 and 1990, this discrepancy was particularly striking: it was not until 1990 that the Politbureau was penetrated by a post-1968 *adhérent* (Francis Wurtz). However, there were still no left-union *adhérents* although the rank and

file was well stocked with *adhérents d'esprit unitaire* (almost 56% of the total membership in 1979).⁵¹ Consequently, as the 1980s approached, the PCF faced a completely new situation: the leadership was not able to "manage" the heterogeneity of the social origins and political generations and experiences in the Party. Not only did the differences of viewpoint and behaviour result in serious intra-party conflicts, but the leadership's insistence on the *ouvriériste* domination also divorced the leaders - and by extension, the Party - from the current social reality in France. The result was a serious crisis (if not a loss) of communist identity.⁵²

Another aspect of the party leadership's struggle to preserve the dominant and leading role of the working class in the PCF is highlighted by Lazar's analysis of the educational levels of the 58 Politbureau members in 1945-90: eleven members had the *certificat d'études* (primary school leaving certificate), eight had the *agrégation* (the highest teaching qualification in France), seven had a *brevet* of some kind or other (an O-level type vocational or school qualification), and six had a technical qualification. From 1974 onward, *agrégés* formed about 25% of the Politbureau (but no *agrégés* ever penetrated the party secretariat, and it was only in 1990 that the university-educated Pierre Zarka made his entry there).⁵³ The conclusion must be that the general level of education of the communist leadership was fairly low which, in the 1950s, would not have been a handicap as it clearly corresponded to the level of education of the majority of the French nation at that time. By the 1980s, however, the situation had changed, and there existed a huge discrepancy between the educational achievements of the PCF leadership and those of the communist rank and file and - for that matter - of the French population at large.

The over-representation of workers in the communist leadership and apparatus was therefore a clear source of problems from the mid-1970s onward. The access of non-working-class members to leading positions was limited (to delegate level, at the most); their entry to the Politburo was carefully controlled; and they were not able to penetrate the party secretariat at all. The Marchais leadership was blocking all attempts to dilute its *pureté sociale* and the *culture politique* of its organisations which had served specific worker categories so well as an instrument of promotion. By hanging on to their outdated notions of *centralité ouvrière* at a time when the numerical and social importance of the working class continued to diminish, the communist leaders showed that they had become completely *déphasés* with social changes in France.

"La sérieuse menace du nouveau mécanisme institutionnel"

The brief description given above concerning the institutional obstacles may seem to suggest that here, indeed, we might be looking at a factor which rendered the PCF an utterly defenceless victim of circumstances. What chance or choice did the communist leadership have in the face of the existing the electoral systems? Choice was indeed limited but the leadership made matters worse by some fatal misjudgements and miscalculations. At the very moment of signing the Common Programme in 1972, the balance of forces had already potentially swung in favour of the PS. The PCF could not have known that at the time but was soon to find out: underestimating as it did the impact of the institutions of the Fifth Republic on the French political scene, the Party realised too late the real significance of a directly elected presidency. In fact, it had been loyally helping to create the presidential image of François Mitterrand and implementing in the minds of the left-wing electorate a "natural" reflex towards a *vote utile* which, as we have seen, automatically stripped the Communists of any important role in French politics.

It was not until 1981 that the PCF publicly admitted to the damaging effects of the institutional elements in its sudden decline. In his report to the Central Committee 28-29.6.1981 Georges Marchais declared that one of the main reasons for the PCF's electoral defeats was the aggressive presidentialisation of the institutions and the perverse effects of the voting system which favoured, "*d'une façon irréaliste*", the Socialist Party and penalised the PCF. "*Nous avons sousestimé la sérieuse menace que constitue pour notre parti ce nouveau mécanisme institutionnel*," Marchais admitted.⁵⁴ Thus, once more, it was the communist leadership's stubborn resistance to change that aggravated the consequences of the long-term institutional dangers. Taking steps to alleviate the worst implications of the institutional forces would have required, at the very least, the abandonment of some of the Party's more extreme structures and dogma. The French Communists might have followed in the footsteps of the Italian Communist Party, which gradually diluted its communist organisation and ideology. The PCF might also have chosen to present more *présidentiable* candidates in the presidential elections - candidates who might have been better equipped with the necessary leadership qualities and popular appeal so important in the modern media-influenced campaigns. The decision to field Marchais in 1981 - at a time when his star was clearly on the wane - and the little known and lack-lustre André Lajoinie in 1988 (a candidate who was, additionally, completely *encadré et éclipsé* by the omnipresence of the secretary general

Marchais) seemed singularly ill-advised when a more appealing candidate in the person of the former Transport Minister Charles Fiterman might have been chosen. However, Marchais' personal power and domination at the head of the Party prevented any major and potentially more presentable personalities from emerging.

“Une démarche de zigzags”

The zigzags in the Communist-Socialist relationship provide a prime example of the communist leadership's strategy choices and its inability to handle them. The PCF's entire left-alliance strategy was based on an erroneous reading of the balance of political forces. After Jacques Duclos' triumphant score of 21% in the 1969 presidential election (as against Gaston Defferre's 5%), the PCF jumped into the conclusion that the Socialists were now a spent force and could be exploited as a manipulable and easily influenced ally. However, two factors arose which completely upset the Communists' calculations: the growing prominence of the middle class following 1968 and the renaissance of the SFIO as the *Parti socialiste*. Unfortunately for the PCF, it was the PS which attracted the middle class (very much underestimated by the PCF in any case).

Furthermore, the communist leadership failed to realise the damaging implications of the alliance with the PS from the point of view of the institutional framework. The Party's competition with the Socialists was always derivative: driven by electoral exigency, the PCF was mostly adjusting to the agenda set by Mitterrand. After the break-up of the Left Union, the PCF no longer had a precise and consistent policy vis-à-vis the PS. The collapse of the Common Programme triggered a profound reaction among communist sympathisers; but it was the 1981 presidential election campaign that really drove home to the communist electorate, still largely preferring a unitarian strategy to bring to power a left-wing government, to severely sanction the PCF for the break-up. The “anti-unitarian” line was therefore a fundamental miscalculation on the part of the Marchais leadership and it revealed the extent to which the leaders had lost touch with communist supporters. As François Hincker wrote, the “*retard réel*” of the PCF was not to have understood how attached communist voters were to the left-union strategy.⁵⁵

Lionel Jospin neatly sums up the meanderings of the PCF leadership as regards Communist-Socialist relations: “*Dénonciations et ralliements, brouilles et réconciliations se succèdent, dans une démarche de zigzag, au milieu des contradictions*

que manifeste la différence des explications chaque fois avancées.” The leadership never had the courage to stay the course and so ended up playing *classe-contre-classe* on the one hand and *la discipline républicaine* on the other. Jospin drily concludes: “[The PCF] never followed through with any of its successive arguments, it was never equal to the historic circumstances which were presented to it and which it had sometimes even fashioned itself.”⁵⁶

“Bilan globalement positif”

At the end of our examination of the effects of the “Soviet factor”, it was not difficult to see how seriously the doggedly defensive actions and analyses of the communist leadership had damaged the Party. The harm done to the PCF’s reputation, credibility and image in the eyes of the French electorate by the various *retards historiques* and the brutal volte-face was extensive, and all the 1980s opinion polls substantiate that fact.

According to various SOFRES opinion polls in the 1980s, the PCF was the one political party in France which aroused the most hostility in the nation. In 1985, 63% of the French questioned in a SOFRES poll declared that “in no circumstances” would they vote for the PCF.⁵⁷ Apparently, this was mainly because of the French Communists’ close identification with the Soviet Union: a BVA-Paris Match poll ascertained in the same year that the first thing that came to people’s mind when asked to “think of the PCF” was the USSR or the Soviet bloc (38%).⁵⁸ Communist voters themselves considered that the deterioration of the image of the Soviet Union was the main cause of the Party’s decline. As seen above, Soviet prestige had suffered as a result of the USSR’s foreign and social policy; but another aspect emerged as the 1980s dawned. The obvious material success of the Western capitalist societies clearly exposed the inefficiency of the socialist system and thus destroyed the myth of the socialist revolution. A 1984 SOFRES poll confirmed the deterioration of the image of the USSR in the French public opinion: in 1972, 28% of the French at large had “rather a favourable opinion” of the *bilan du socialisme* in the Soviet bloc; by 1980, that percentage had halved and in 1982 it was only 11%. On the other hand, negative opinions had gathered pace accordingly: from 43% in 1972 to 59% in 1980 and to 69% in 1982. The same trend could be observed among communist sympathisers: from 62% of positive opinions in 1972, the percentage went down to 35% by 1982. The early years of Gorbachev’s reforms did not improve the situation. In 1985-86, 69% of the French still had a negative opinion of the “global Soviet balance sheet”, and amongst

communist supporters 38% had a negative opinion against 40% of positive opinions.⁵⁹ The inescapable reality was neatly expressed by Lionel Jospin: "*Les héros, pour la jeunesse, ne sont plus Staline, Tito ou Castro, mais Walesa, Havel et Sakharov.*"⁶⁰

In the face of such *incontournable* facts, the PCF leadership still continued to cling to its virtually unchanged world view. Many of the remaining militants, however, had now clearly lost their bearings: according to yet another opinion poll by BVA-France Inter-Le Nouvel Observateur, conducted among the militants and sympathisers at the *Fête de L'Humanité* in September 1991, 80% of the militants considered Marchais' own balance sheet "*globalement positif*" - but 43% of them still wanted him to resign as the party leader (against 41% who wanted him to stay on). As to the party line, 51% of the communist militants thought it should be changed whereas 39% saw no need for a change. It is therefore permissible to conclude that the demise of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had raised more questions than ever before - and, certainly, more than the leadership of the time was willing or able to answer - about the relevance and *raison d'être* of a communist party. Officially, however, the PCF was unwavering in its refusal to see itself as an "*orphelin du monde d'hier*".⁶¹

"L'effet Marchais"

*"Qu'il semble lointain le temps, où maniant la langue française avec originalité, superbe d'aplomb, il séduisait une partie de la France à travers le petit écran qui fit longtemps sa fortune avant de contribuer à son infortune, puis à son discrédit."*⁶²

Georges Marchais officially became the PCF's secretary-general in 1972. As a result of Waldeck Rochet's illness however he had already become the latter's *de facto* successor in 1969 and deputy secretary general in 1970. Marchais' rise in the PCF was as meteoric as it was unexpected: unlike many party veterans, such as Etienne Fajon and Benoît Frachon, he did not join the Party until 1947 (at the age of 27). What is more, for the prewar period there is no trace of his ever being involved with any political or trade union activities; indeed, Marchais himself has admitted that at the time of the Popular Front, he observed it "*d'assez loin*" because "*j'étais toujours ni politisé ni syndiqué*".⁶³

The mystery deepens when Marchais' wartime record is examined (and it has been examined many times, thoroughly): from 1940 Marchais worked for the Luftwaffe, first in France and subsequently in Germany. There are also doubts as to the date of his return to France and it appears that he may well have stayed on in Germany until the end of the war.⁶⁴

For almost ten years after joining the PCF and the CGT in 1947, Georges Marchais remained "*un petit permanent sans histoire*" until his sudden rise to prominence as a member of the secretariat of the Seine-Sud federation (Thorez's own federation). Rumour has it that he subsequently attended the International Lenin School in Moscow in 1954, but no evidence for this exists. From the mid-1950s, Marchais' rise in the party hierarchy was fast and unstoppable; and after Thorez's death in 1964, he started to forge personal links with the Soviet leadership which, according to Robrieux, would explain his accession to the leadership in 1972.⁶⁵ Quite apart from the obvious problems associated with his lack of early political activism and his murky wartime record, Marchais was the first French CP general secretary without the traditional self-taught intellectual's baggage. To quote Robrieux, Marchais was not "*capable d'acquérir le bagage qui fait d'un militant d'origine populaire un intellectuel d'un type nouveau*"; hence the need to put him through a rigorous training programme (however, Marchais never attended a party school⁶⁶). Marchais' early popularity as the PCF leader is attributed by Robrieux to *l'air du temps*: "*Dans le climat des années post-68, même ses fautes de français, la grossièreté de ses manières jouent en sa faveur: en lui c'est un peu le barbare qui fascine.*"⁶⁷ The task of grooming Marchais was entrusted to Jean Kanapa, party intellectual and the PCF's foreign affairs expert, and Charles Fiterman,⁶⁸ *intellectual autodidacte*, and supervised by the PCF's "pro-Soviet lobby".

In the wake of the intra-party conflict after the break-up of the Left Union, Marchais' "assets" were transformed into glaring handicaps, both within and without the Party. By the 1980s, it was clear that the PCF's leader was inextricably tied to the communist legacy, his body language and rhetoric a painful reminder of a bygone era. His very presence served as a constant reminder to the Party and the electorate of the past that the PCF had come from - and where it remained stuck. There is no doubt that the personal rejection of Georges Marchais by the French electorate reflected badly on the PCF. His popularity was at its highest point immediately after the 1974 presidential election: according to a SOFRES poll in June/July 1974, 34% of the French "wished to see Georges Marchais play an important role in the future".⁶⁹ However, as the Left Alliance stumbled on painfully and finally collapsed, so did the popularity of the secretary general. SOFRES surveys between 1976 and 1985 concerning Marchais' leadership ability confirm the downward trend: in 1972, 62% of the French thought that he was "*plutôt bon comme leader*" but by 1985, this figure had dropped by half. Conversely, 16% of the French had considered Marchais "*plutôt mauvais*" in 1976; nine years later

51% thought so.⁷⁰ In addition, Marchais' image seems to have deteriorated equally noticeably in all age groups, among both sexes and all socioprofessional categories as well as among *le peuple communiste*. Whereas in 1976 Marchais had enjoyed the full and almost unanimous support of communist sympathisers - 90% considered him as a "*plutôt bon leader*" - by 1985 only 57% agreed. Furthermore, a third of communist supporters interviewed considered Marchais as "*plutôt un mauvais leader*".⁷¹

After examining the role played by the communist leadership in the marginalisation of the Party it would be fairly easy to conclude that the PCF was indeed the victim of circumstances. However, the roots of the inability of this "victim" to fight back lay deep within its own character. It was also prevented from doing so by the "specialists" by its bedside, namely by those leading the Party for the last twenty years. Before the collapse of its main point of reference, the Soviet Union, the PCF's unconditional solidarity was the cause of the deterioration of the communist image in French public opinion. Moreover, under the impulse of the anti-PS and *ouvriériste* elements, the PCF slipped steadily further away from the realities of French society. The institutional obstacles were ignored for far too long because of the leadership's miscalculation of the *équilibre des forces* on the French left; these miscalculations also led to fatal mistakes regarding the rise of the rejuvenated Socialist Party. Consequently, in the face of a process of decline, the communist leadership appeared singularly complacent and incapable - despite being fully aware of what was happening. Instead, the Party successfully cultivated an efficient strategy of self-preservation of the leadership circle whose sole aim was *auto-reproduction* - reproducing itself in order to preserve its concept of communist identity and its own power. In pursuing this strategy, the leadership made full and skilful use of the Party's organisational principle, democratic centralism, and the intra-party political education system.

Democratic centralism as a tool of the leadership⁷²

The term "democratic centralism" made its entry into the communist vocabulary in 1905, and it subsequently became one of the 21 conditions for acceptance of a party into the Comintern. Article 12 of the document stipulated: "All parties belonging to the Communist International should be formed on the basis of the principle of democratic centralism. At the present time of acute civil war, the Communist Party will be able to fully do its duty only when *it possesses an iron discipline*, and its party centre enjoys the confidence of the members of the party, who are to endow this centre *with complete*

power, authority and ample rights.”⁷³ The organisational forms developed by the Soviet Communist Party during the first 25 years as the only established bastion of Marxism-Leninism became a major point of reference for communist parties. However, given that democratic centralism was the guiding principle of a party aspiring to rule a still largely peasant country, there were bound to be problems with the non-ruling Western communist parties functioning in very diverse historical, cultural and economic surroundings and trying to identify themselves with the Soviet role model. As Michael Waller⁷⁴ crucially points out, these basic differences between ruling and non-ruling communist parties should have been reflected in their organisational behaviour; however, their slavish adherence to the Russian model and their lack of adaptation to individual circumstances was a recipe for enormous problems and even extinction for those parties which failed to adapt.

Based on the PCF’s revolutionary theory, democratic centralism was the condition for the ideological and political cohesion of the Party, and for its unity of action. The main principles were free discussion at all levels; majority decisions applied by all; interdiction of all fractional activity; democratic election of leading organs of the various levels of the Party; collective leadership; accountability of elected leading bodies to their electors; the decisions of higher organs to be binding on lower organs to ensure the strength of the Party; and finally, freely exercised criticism and self-criticism in all organisations and at all levels of the Party.⁷⁵ On the face of it, there is nothing special in the *theory* of democratic centralism as defined by the rules of the PCF that would set it apart from the rules and regulations of other parties. But as observers generally point out, the *theoretical definition* does not reflect the reality and practice of democratic centralism. This is supported by Georges Marchais’ own words during the preparations for the PCF’s 25th Congress in 1984: “*Le centralisme démocratique, ça tient sur un timbre-poste, le tout, c’est la pratique.*”⁷⁶ Therefore, democratic centralism should be examined through the eyes of its critics in order to interpret what the party rules leave unsaid - what Georges Lavau calls *le non-dit* - rather than what they do say.

Michel Naudy, a journalist and a former PCF member, has critically analysed the “formidable battery of weapons” which the communist party leadership had at its disposal for “practising” democratic centralism and for controlling intra-party debate, “*les six péchés du centralisme démocratique*”. The following account is based on this analysis.

First, only the outgoing leadership had the right to draw up the pre-congress draft resolution (*projet de résolution*) which was then submitted to the members who could express their opinions by putting forward amendments, by abstaining or voting against it; they could not, however, present an alternative draft resolution (Fiterman tried to do just that in the 27th Congress in 1990 but it was rejected). The Politbureau, having already discussed the resolution text and taken a “vote” on it and the Central Committee, only needed to rubberstamp the cut-and-dried document.

Second, the leadership controlled the PCF’s main organ, *L’Humanité*, the platform for all open discussion and the only “legal” means of diffusing the thoughts and proposals of party members to all Communists. This meant that only “suitable” contributions were usually published; if critical contributions did appear, they were “spontaneously” and “vigilantly” refuted by counterclaims published in the form of immediate responses.

Third, the leadership was able to direct and control (*encadrer*) the progress of the debate by applying the principle of “collective leadership” in respect of all outgoing leaders during the preparatory stages of the party congress. Consequently, a member of the leadership who opposed a proposal or a motion was still obliged to promote that proposal or motion once it had been accepted by majority vote. Furthermore, the “heretic” was not allowed to explain or justify his/her disagreement to other party members, who were thus kept in total darkness about any debates or disputes within the leadership.

Fourth, the PCF leadership’s line was the official line and only one that got voiced. As no tendencies or fractions were allowed, only the representatives of the leadership had access to party media and as explained above, the leadership had to speak with *une seule voix*. This enabled the party leaders to intervene from outside any debate and subtly direct the course of the debate. (Witness Marchais’ intervention in the debate concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat: he nipped in the bud all arguments by declaring to a journalist of *L’Humanité* that he “personally” was in favour of the dictum’s abandonment; the same “personal view” was subsequently reiterated on television before any meaningful discussion on the subject had taken place.)

Fifth, the leadership had at its disposal an “elite army” of paid party workers, the so-called *permanents* or functionaries whose main task, according to Naudy, was to see that the draft documents drawn up by the leadership were adopted - “à tout prix”. The

permanents were an important cog in the machinery of democratic centralism and much has been written about them, their devotion to the cause and their unwavering loyalty.⁷⁷ According to Borkenau, in the final stages of bolshevisation, “between 1929 and 1934, the communist parties finally and definitely formed themselves into quasi-military organisations, ready to obey anything. The structure did not change: at the top a bureaucracy from which every single man likely to oppose orders had been weeded out; in the middle a small stratum with an absolute unquestioning faith in every order; at the bottom a shifting mass ... They had become an obedient army of crusaders.”⁷⁸ For the purposes of applying the principle of democratic centralism, the *permanents* occupied diverse functions and had different levels of status. Both Kriegel and Lavau have defined them as politically trained men and women who had abandoned - for good, in most cases - their original occupation, and who depended on the Party, directly or indirectly, for their income, career prospects, standard of life and promotion. Lavau has underlined the importance of the “political *permanents*” who controlled the most important aspects of party life and activity and divided them in five categories: party journalists, *collaborateurs* of the Central Committee, the federal secretaries, members of the Central Committee, and finally, the most influential group, the members of the party secretariat, the Politbureau and the Central Commission for Political Control.⁷⁹

Finally, we shall return to Naudy’s analysis of the communist leadership’s sixth “weapon” in the application of democratic centralism: the leadership’s complete knowledge of everything that took place within the Party. The communist party structure is vertical, and the base of the pyramid is formed by cells where freedom of discussion was traditionally almost total. However, these cells were isolated, and there was no horizontal network across the country. The only communication was therefore from the base up (whereas the discipline flowed from the top down), and any sideways movement of discussion and information was non-existent. The “free” debates were thus easily contained at the lowest level. As Naudy puts it, “although the right hand does not know what the left hand does, the head knows perfectly well what both hands are up to and, in any case, knows enough to prevent them from joining”!⁸⁰

The pyramidal structure was repeated in the way that cadres were appointed: all leaders, however modest their function, were designated by the next level above them and the lower level generally only confirmed the decision. Moreover, before being able to enter the Politbureau, a candidate had to be elected right through the system - his/her cell, section, federation, the congress and the Central Committee - and also had to be

included in the majority group which alone could “supply” delegates. Consequently, a handful of people at the top was able to decide about everything, having confiscated all means of debate. Fittingly, Naudy writes that “from democratic centralism, the PCF moved to aristocratic centralism”⁸¹. In this way, the leadership became a sinecure for a small co-opted elite whose word was law and who applied its own brand of democratic centralism in order to perpetuate itself.

Conclusion

It emerges from the above description of democratic centralism that the usual criticism expressed by communist party dissidents was mostly valid: the system, by its operation and practices, made it difficult to propose and implement change. Its collective psychology, application and high degree of centralisation created extreme inflexibility and made it difficult for the PCF to adapt to changing circumstances both at home and abroad. Any process of change was further hindered by the leadership’s ability to demolish the opposition of party dissidents (who were in any case divided amongst themselves). Furthermore, the ban on any fractional activity and the development of vertical linking and the compartmentalisation of the Party, which restricted the freedom of action of the base,⁸² invested the communist leadership with a power and authority that rested on much more than the majority principle, since a minority was easily transformed into an opposition and then if necessary, denounced as traitors to the Party. Thus, armed with its disproportionate power, the communist leadership was able to preserve its strict orthodoxy and perpetuate its resistance to change.

Although certain changes did take place in the way that the PCF practised democratic centralism, it was not always clear what changed regarding the notion of democratic centralism itself. As Waller points out,⁸³ relations between the PCF and its front organisations did change, and the traditional rhetoric also underwent considerable modifications (witness the abandonment of the dictatorship of proletariat). But a change in tactics and strategy is not to be confused with the transformation of deeply ingrained concepts and behaviour patterns: tactical and mostly ad-hoc window-dressing was one thing, and the real practice of democratic centralism another - and it was in the latter that very little change took place. Instead, change in the PCF seemed to take place in three ways: as a negation of the past rather than movement toward clearly formulated, ideologically rooted positions on which the Party settled; as a response to events and conditions over which the Party had little control; or as a consequence of the death or

incapacity of individuals (witness the last years of Maurice Thorez and Waldeck Rochet).⁸⁴ The application of democratic centralism kept the PCF as a solid, working-class community, the preservation of which appeared to be more important than the need to influence the political system and decision-making. The PCF clung to ideological conservatism, and its immobilism became a source of emotional stability and of solidarity amongst its members.

Furthermore, the practical elements of democratic centralism as applied by the PCF remained untouched, thus enabling the leadership to resist challenges to its own authority or orthodoxy. The result was a closed, well disciplined, mechanised and monolithic party organisation; one which resembled a military apparatus, but whose methods of regimentation and control were considerably more adaptable and efficient because they were based on *a training of minds* rather than that of bodies. It was this training that claimed to provide a complete and final philosophy of the universe and whose aim was two-fold. Firstly, the preservation of communist identity, and of the power of the leadership which rested on that identity, and secondly, the promotion of homogeneity in order to maintain the Party's ideological cohesion and unity. The importance of the PCF's training procedures in transforming a heterogeneous assortment of *militants* into a coherent political force and in producing committed, ideologically correct leaders is therefore unquestionable, and the issue of how the PCF trained its leadership thus becomes elemental to the understanding of the Party's postwar evolution and its eventual decline.

The next chapter will therefore be devoted to a closer examination of the specific communist political training system in the wider context of traditional political education as one element in the process of political socialisation. There will also be an attempt to construct an "identikit" of the desired end product of the training process, i.e. the "ideal Communist".

Notes and references

1. HINCKER, F., 'Le PCF au carrefour', *Projet*, no. 161, janvier 1982, p. 42. The article was written after the PCF's electoral *débâcle* in 1981.
2. JOSPIN, L., *L'invention du possible*. (Flammarion, Paris, 1991), p. 86.
3. YSMAL, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
4. *Ibid.*

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5. Courtois dates the moment of change back to 1968 and the restructuring crisis of 1974; see COURTOIS, & PESCHANSKI, *From Decline to Marginalisation: the PCF breaks with French Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-68.
 6. LAZAR, M., *Maisons rouges*. (Aubier, 1992), p. 160, note 19 (quoted from SOFRES, *L'état de l'opinion*, Clés pour 1988, p. 208.). Lazar also states that, between 1975 and 1989, the percentage of workers in the active population dropped by 16.3%.
 7. COURTOIS & PESHCANSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
 8. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 160-61. These were marriages or relationships between workers and clerical workers as it tends to be the *employé(e)* element which dominates and refuses all identification with the *monde ouvrier*; the outcome is that usually the latter "move up" from "their" category.
 9. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
 10. COURTOIS & PESCHANSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
 11. Ibid. Veritable specimens of the ecosystem were the *ceinture rouge* around Paris and the valley of the Longwy basin with its steelworks. See also COURTOIS, in *Autrement*, for the fate of the Renault-Billancourt factory which became a true communist bastion after 1945 and was closed down in 1992 despite vociferous protest campaigns led by the PCF and CGT.
 12. SCHWARTZ, O., 'Réflexions sur un rendez-vous manqué: le Parti communiste et les ouvriers des années 80', in *Culture des camarades*, *Autrement*, 1991, p. 33.
 13. Ibid., pp. 27-29.
 14. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
 15. DUHAMEL, A., *Les habits neufs de la politique*. (Flammarion, 1989), p. 43.
 16. See BELL, D.S. & CRIDDLE, B., 'The Communist Party: out of the frying pan', in *French Socialists in Power: 1981-86* (ed. McCARTHY, P., Greenwood Press, 1987), p. 25, on which most of the following is based.
 17. TIERSKY, 'Declining Fortunes of the French Communist Party in Problems of Communism', *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.
 18. ROSS, & JENSON, 'The tragedy of the French Left', *op. cit.*, p. 22.
 19. DUHAMEL, O. & JAFFRÉ, J., *Le nouveau président* (Seuil, 1987), p. 137.
 20. Witness the headline of *L'Humanité* on 29th September 1958, "*La constitution monarchique adoptée*" mentioned by RAYMOND, G., 'Les ambitions présidentielles d'André Lajoinie et Pierre Juquin', in *ACTIF 1989*, (Aston Modern Languages Club Publication, 1989), p. 100.
 21. BELL, & CRIDDLE, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
 22. See WRIGHT, 'The French Communist Party during the Fifth Republic: the troubled path', *op. cit.*, table 4, p. 157, for the performance of the PCF in the legislative elections during the Fifth Republic. Wright demonstrates how the Party's periods of weakness, isolation and unpopularity correspond to its periods of electoral failure.
 23. François Mitterrand in GIESBERT, F-O., *Le Président*. (Seuil, Paris, 1990), pp. 27-8.
 24. The PCF's debacle in the 1958 legislative elections had taught the Party a sharp lesson: after refusing all common strategy with the SFIO at the second ballot, the Communists' share of the vote fell from 26% to 19%; however, their number of deputies dropped from 150 to 10!
 25. The PCF published its *Changer de cap* in November 1971 and the PS *Changer la vie* in December

1971 (amended in March 1972).

26. In a report written to the Central Committee in June 1972 but kept secret until 1975 Marchais expressed his worries regarding left-wing unity and the unreliability of the Socialists. According to Marchais, the PS would have to be watched closely to prevent any return to alliances with centre parties; the PCF should not delude itself with any illusion about the PS's sincerity; despite the Common Programme, there was no ideological rapprochement between the two parties; and the success of the joint programme could only be assured if the Communists retained their hegemony of the left. (FAJON, E., *L'union est un combat*, Editions sociales, Paris, 1975, p. 118)
27. Immediately after the signing of the Common Programme, Mitterrand reiterated to a meeting of the Socialist International in Vienna his intention to "rebuild a great Socialist Party on the ground which is presently occupied by the Communist Party itself", to prove that "out of five million communist voters, three million can, in future, vote socialist. This is the reason for the agreement." *Le Monde*, 30.6.1972. This statement was quoted word for word by Marchais in his secret report of 29 June 1972. Marchais added: "*Il est clair que la conclusion d'un programme commun, la perspective d'un gouvernement dans lequel le PS jouerait un rôle important, donnerait à celui-ci des bases dans son effort pour se renforcer à notre détriment, si nous ne faisons pas ce que nous devons faire.*" (FAJON, *L'union est un combat*, *op. cit.*, p. 118)
28. For the Socialists, the defeat had a sweetener: for the first time ever, the PS overtook the PCF in votes (22.7% against 20.61%) and became, in "geographical and social terms, a party with wide general appeal, a catch-all party"; see CHAPSAL, J., *La vie politique sous la Ve République* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1981), p. 614.
29. See HAZAREESINGH, S., *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party: Disillusion and Decline*. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991), for a comprehensive account of this revolt.
30. François Hincker, Roland Leroy's secretary 1971-74 and *mis hors du parti* in 1981, wrote in 1986: "In 1979, the PCF had fallen back on a non-strategy - for the first time in its history. Up until 1936, the revolutionary strategy retained a certain credibility in the small communist movement in France and after 1947, the union of the left became the point of reference. The first strategy was no longer tenable - the Party having itself repudiated it - whilst the second had been abandoned. The Party had nothing left but 'being there'". See HINCKER, F., 'France: le PCF divorce de la société', *Communisme*, 11-12, 1986, pp. 86-98.
31. Charles Fiterman was given the Ministry of Transport, Anicet Le Pors became the Minister in charge of the Civil Service, Jack Ralite was in charge of the Ministry of Health and Marcel Rigout of Professional Training.
32. Marchais promised that the PCF would be "*ni force d'appoint, ni mouche de coche*" whereas Roland Leroy, editor of *L'Humanité* and a firm opponent of the left union, gave an ambiguous warning that "*si les communistes participent au gouvernement de la France, ils ne sont pas, pour autant, parti de gouvernement*". (*Le Monde*, *Bilan du Septennat*, 1988, p. 71).
33. Georges Marchais, interviewed on France Inter 27.8.1991 after the failed Moscow coup.
34. WRIGHT, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
35. Roger Martelli, the PCF historian, finally published the secret speech in 1982, see "*1956: le choc du XXème Congrès du PCUS*" (Editions sociales, Paris, 1982).
36. Marchais had already made the same declaration at the Vitry meeting in December 1978; see HAZAREESINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
37. "Comme si cette allégeance ne suffisait pas, Georges Marchais la fit connaître aux Français en duplex télévisé de Moscou"; see DUHAMEL & JAFFRÉ, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
38. For an excellent account of the disaffiliation and hemorrhage of the PCF's intellectual membership,

see HAZAREESINGH, *op. cit.*

39. TIERSKY, 'Declining fortunes of the French Communist Party', *op. cit.*, p. 15.
40. The CPSU even went as far as to criticise the PCF's poor performance in the 1988 presidential election which was due to a "lack of programme and slogans which might attract large sectors of the population"; see the article published in *Izvestiya*, quoted in *L'Humanité* 4.5.1988.
41. A French Communist delegation participated in the November 1989 Romanian Communist Party Congress and expressed its confidence that "the Romanian Communists and population would find the way to create a contemporary socialist society"; see MORRIS, P., 'The French Communist Party and the Revolutions of 1989', Paper given at the PSA Conference at University of Lancaster, 1991: West European Communist Responses to the Revolutions of 1989.
42. *Le Monde*, 21.8.1991.
43. NAUDY, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
44. JOSPIN, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
45. DUHAMEL, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
46. TIERSKY, *Declining Fortunes of the French Communist Party*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
47. COURTOIS & PESCHANSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.
48. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
49. *Ibid.*
50. COURTOIS & PESCHANSKI, *op. cit.*, p.65.
51. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.
52. COURTOIS & PESCHANSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
53. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-49. Lazar also points out that, out of the *agrégés*, eight had a working-class background.
54. *Projet de Résolution*, published in *L'Humanité* 13.10.1981.
55. HINCKER, 'Le Parti communiste au carrefour', *op. cit.*, p. 47.
56. JOSPIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.
57. LE GALL, G., 'Radiographie de l'image du PCF: double divorce avec la société et les sympathisants', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, 914, janv./fév. 1985, p. 18.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
59. TIERSKY, *Declining Fortunes of the French Communist Party*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
60. JOSPIN, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
61. VAN DIGGELEN, M. (now KIVISAARI, M.), 'On ne naît pas communiste, on le devient: French Communist Party Education Today', *op. cit.*, p.31, quoted from the 27th Congress Resolution, p. 11.
62. LE GALL, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
63. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, Tome II, *op. cit.*, p. 657.
64. See *Le Point* of 7.9.1991, pp. 18-20 for an up-date on Marchais' activities during the war and the

immediate postwar period - a huge gap remains even today. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste, Tome II, op. cit.*, also attempts to unravel Marchais' past.

65. "... les camarades soviétiques suggèrent que ce soit Georges Marchais qu'ils connaissent bien, et qui est bien connu dans le mouvement communiste international", explained Gaston Plissonnier; see ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste, Tome II, op. cit.*, p. 650.
66. Interview with Marcel Rosette 9.9.1991. Rosette was absolutely adamant in his claim that Marchais never went to any party school at all.
67. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste, Tome II, op. cit.*, p. 685.
68. Fiterman's role as Marchais' "teacher" and speech writer explains his dangerousness as one of the leading dissidents to the 1980s leadership: here was a man with complete inside knowledge, opposing the official leadership and party line.
69. LE GALL, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
72. This was clearly explained by Ferdinand Laporte, doyen of the Isère Federal Committee and a municipal councillor of Grenoble: "*Et puis, ce qui compte, ce n'est pas la tête de Georges Marchais. C'est un problème second. Le problème réside dans un mode de fonctionnement qui fait la direction du parti est, pour l'essentiel, réservée à un type de cadres [classe ouvrière].*" See CARDOZE, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.
73. DANIELS, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
74. WALLER, *Democratic Centralism: the Costs of Discipline, op. cit.*, p. 21.
75. *Ibid.*, Appendix, pp. 264-65.
76. NAUDY, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
77. See in particular KRIEDEL, *The French Communists, op. cit.* and LAVAU, *A quoi sert le PCF? op. cit.*
78. WALLER, *Democratic Centralism: the Costs of Discipline, op. cit.*, p. 21.
79. LAVAU, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-98.
80. NAUDY, *op. cit.*, 105.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
82. See DUVERGER, M., *Les partis politiques* (Armand Colin, Paris, 1976), p. 423, on the compartmentalisation of communist parties.
83. WALLER, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL EDUCATION: THE MOULDING PROCESS

*"Without a revolutionary theory
there can be no revolutionary movement.
This cannot be insisted upon too strongly."*

V. I. Lenin
(*"What is to be done?"*)

The purpose of the present chapter is to place the communist training system into the wider framework of political socialisation and to establish the crucial importance of political education in the context of our study. First, there will be a general discussion about the various types and agents of political socialisation. We will then examine the process of political education in communist and non-communist societies: although the functions of the process were largely similar, the difference is that under a totalitarian regime (in this case, the Soviet Union) all the other overt agencies were working in the same direction (except perhaps the family in some cases), while in Western democracies the communist parties had their own system of socialisation and education to counter the prevailing political culture. In the case of communist societies, agencies of what might be called 'primary' political socialisation were already embedded in everyday life and experience. This was obviously not the case in non-communist societies where communist political socialisation had to compete with and counteract the effects of quite a different set of norms and values. To emphasise this distinction, we shall therefore first examine the methods used to effect this process under a totalitarian regime, i.e. the USSR. This will be followed by an in-depth examination of political education as *one* element in the multifaceted process of political socialisation in Western communist parties. There will be an attempt to explain why these communist parties made such substantial allocations of their human, financial and organisational resources to maintain a structured party school network for formal political instruction. It will be argued that the formal training system was in fact the definitive refining touch in the process of political socialisation of a select body of people who were destined for special functions and higher responsibilities within the party and its mass organisations.

Communist parties also believed that their position was intellectually strengthened by the “academic” side of Marxism, i.e. dialectical materialism, which took on the prestige of a modern science - especially in the case of working-class students with little formal education. “Scientific Marxism” provided verbal answers which were decipherable only by the “initiated” leadership. The study and mastery of Marxism-Leninism thus created and preserved coherence and discipline, and established common values, modes of thought and discourse in an often hostile environment. This was crucial for maintaining ideological unity, given that “*M. Waldeck-Rochet, M. Louis Althusser, le rédacteur du bulletin de la cellule Seine-Visconti et l’électeur communiste de Huelgoat (Finistère) ne perçoivent pas exactement le communisme de la même façon*”.¹ We shall therefore also briefly examine the function of Scientific Marxism in the communist political education programme.

Finally, it would be rather pointless to outline the role of the political education system without attempting to find out what it was meant to achieve. One of the most important tasks of the party schools was to pick “promising” people and mould them into politically trustworthy activists who could then safely assume responsibilities at the various levels of party apparatus and the various party-controlled mass organisations and movements. They were the raw material from which the communist party intended to create its “ideal cadres” in possession of the necessary qualities and beliefs. Although this ideal type never existed in reality, communist parties always presented “models” of such individuals toward which militants were expected to strive. There will therefore first be an attempt to construct an “identikit” of the desired end product, the “ideal Communist”. Finally, we shall take a look at a representative of this unique group of people: in the case of the PCF, the best known model was Maurice Thorez, and there will be an examination of his credentials for this role.

Political socialisation

*“Salut à toi parti ma famille nouvelle
Salut à toi parti mon frère désormais*

*Salut à toi qu'il faut qu'on choisisse
Quand toute chose est claire et patent
le danger.*"²

In the sections which follow, we shall attempt to define the contours of political socialisation, and more specifically, the function and the vital importance of one of its principal instruments, namely political education.

In broad terms, political socialisation is defined as the process of induction into the political culture.³ It is a process whereby individuals acquire their political orientations and a set of attitudes - cognitions, value standards and feelings - toward the political system and its various roles and which, to a certain degree, determines their perceptions and their reactions to political phenomena.⁴ Although there is much dispute as to which processes are significant and at what point in the life cycle the most important socialisation takes place (the first wave of political socialisation research over-identified socialisation with childhood experience; the classic study in this field was Herbert Hyman's *Political Socialization* in 1959),⁵ political socialisation is generally considered to be about the development of the "political self",⁶ involving a continuous learning process through both emotional learning and evident political indoctrination.⁷

Holmes identifies two main types of socialisation: first, we have *latent* socialisation, which is primarily non-political and in which, while there is no overt, deliberate attempt to inculcate values, attitudes or behaviours these are transmitted anyway (parents often transmit political orientations to their children). There are numerous and complex agencies of latent socialisation which exercise differential influences and vary in the degree to which they reinforce or contradict each other.⁸ They include factors relating to both past political traditions and experiences, and ongoing developments.⁹ Early stages of the political socialisation process are the same in all political systems, regardless of their degree of complexity; it is always a latent, primary process - diffuse, particularistic, ascriptive and affective.¹⁰ The family and the primary education system are the major agencies of initial socialisation. However, socialisation in any particular position in childhood is not thought to be sufficient to prepare a person for adult politics:

with the appearance of new issues, an unprepared adult is unable to cope without preparation.¹¹ For adults, wider (but still latent) agencies of socialisation include the workplace and the local community.

In contrast to latent socialisation, *purposive* socialisation is expressly designed to affect attitudes. In adult life purposive socialisation occurs through political groupings (political parties, interest groups) or associations with other milieux such as religious or ethnic groupings. Political parties were traditionally regarded as having interactive and educative functions for their members, sometimes in accord and sometimes at odds with the prevailing political culture. Kavanagh for example notes the important role of the German Social Democratic Party in 'developing solidarity among the working class *against* other groups'.¹² In modern democratic societies the socialising role of most political parties has declined, partly because of the growth of mass education but also because many parties began to orient themselves towards a wider electorate.¹³

The quest for the "Homo Sovieticus"

The major importance of purposive socialisation lies in the fact how well it teaches people to respond to the regime or party in certain expected ways. Durham Hollander observes that whereas civic education has a conservative function, in a revolutionary regime, the "initial thrust of political education is the opposite - a radical alternation of old attitudes and behaviours and the teaching of new political view" until the consolidation of power in the hands of the new regime. It is only *afterwards* that the main task of political socialisation will no longer consist of political transformation but rather the *preservation of the status quo* - but now with the additional problem of attempting to keep going the dynamism of the revolution whilst at the same time protecting the new regime from the attendant political upheavals.¹⁴ At this point, political socialisation may become a more sinister process where individuals are moulded into typecast roles in order to serve the system. Recent history is full of examples of totalitarian regimes that have attempted to teach "correct" values and norms to their populations from early childhood. Not surprisingly, then, purposive socialisation was very prevalent in the communist world where the regimes made a huge effort to

inculcate particular orientations and the current political *Weltanschauung*.¹⁵

The Soviet Communists were the trailblazers in purposive political socialisation and it was in the Soviet Union that it traditionally received the greatest attention and concern.¹⁶ The Bolsheviks understood the role that political socialisation may play in the transformation of the regimes when a new leadership is faced with the need to “educate” the population about the new order. Upon taking power, the Bolsheviks had two main tasks: to mould the population of Russia according to their ideological pattern and to find and train hundreds of thousands of people for important positions at all levels of the state, the army, the economy and the educational machinery.¹⁷ Communist regimes maintained a variety of overt, explicit and purposive agents of socialisation. Initially this programme was designed partly to counter the influence of the family, notably in regard to religious or bourgeois values. In communist societies in general and the Soviet communist society in particular, the main purposive socialisation agencies were the state education system (including adult education), the media and mass organisations (the party itself, youth and trade union organisations, etc.). All ministries dealing with these matters were supervised by the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee of the CPSU and lower-level party committees.¹⁸ The formal education system is an obvious example: not only did the compulsory study of Marxism form an independent subject, but other subjects were also taught in a suitable ideological light.¹⁹ In Soviet schools, the curriculum included courses with a purely political orientation (“fundamentals of political knowledge” or political economy) which stressed only the Marxist-Leninist view of reality. Marxism-Leninism was therefore presented as the basis of all knowledge: social, political, aesthetic, scientific. Classroom ‘ritual’ was another source of political learning: it consisted of the teaching of slogans, songs and stories which glorified the CPSU.²⁰ During the education system, and after leaving it, young people would also undergo further moulding by other socialisation agencies as mentioned above.

The Bolshevik regime was therefore the first to not merely set itself propaganda goals but also - through political education - to aim to create a “new humanity” which was suited to live in a new society.²¹ In communist countries loyalty to the ruling party was

therefore *learned* and this provided the 'correct' sense of direction and self-assurance. The alternative was often a frustrating and frightening sense of isolation and a purely negative rejection of the system - and being rejected *by* the system.²² The successfully indoctrinated individual was equipped with prefabricated answers to all questions addressed to him, and he reacted to certain stimuli ("capitalists") in foreseeable ways. He saw the world exclusively from the point of view and in the light of ideology, and was therefore able to act in any given situation *on his own initiative* in whatever way was required by the system. Trust in the party and dedication to it always helped to resolve many of the dilemmas as well as uncertainties inherent in life and the dangerous world situation (for example, in the Cold War period). Thus, the communist parties have often - but not always (cf. Poland) - succeeded in taking over and monopolising the omnipotent role previously played by religious institutions as the provider of psychological relief and stability in the face of threatening and complex situations.²³ One of the main features of Soviet political indoctrination was that it was also reinforced by a coercive system which was intended to force people to behave in a prescribed way: "Even if an individual resists internalising the Soviet communist world presented to him, he is coerced to behave in ways which demonstrate that he has accepted it ('demonstrations' of enthusiasm, loyalty, participation in mass campaigns, meetings and rallies)." ²⁴

*"Etudier pour agir, agir en étudiant"*²⁵

Where communist parties enjoyed a political monopoly, everyone was subject to ideological education in schools, the media and culture and the workplace. At the same time, there was a separate and specific system of party schooling for party members and functionaries. These were the cream, the vanguard who needed more specialist knowledge as provided by the specialist divisions of Agitprop and party schools. However, in non-communist countries the agencies of socialisation are under state control and that of other social forces - they are conservative. The communist parties therefore developed their own socialisation programme for members and ancillary organisations to counter the wider cultural and political hegemonic discourse. This generated an alternative subculture or counterculture.²⁶ New recruits had in most cases

already been exposed to a number of other agents of political socialisation such as the family ("*Je suis né de sang communiste*," said one respondent ²⁷) or what Lavau calls "*l'adhésion d'imprégnation*";²⁸ peer groups, school or workplace, a student or a communist youth organisation, and a trade union. Joining the party was therefore often the next logical step which took the person's political commitment one degree further.²⁹ The party continued the process of purposive political socialisation by disseminating information, organising debates, enabling its members to understand politics and to express their opinions, and - in the case of a select body of people - by providing them with a theoretical and practical political education programme in party-run training schools.³⁰

The Soviet system of party schools was thus mirrored in communist parties in Western democracies and *political education* - in general terms, the "inculcation of and identification with the goals and values of a political community"³¹ - therefore formed an important part of the socialising process of the party activist. In addition to that, political education also constituted a method by which political recruitment into specific roles in the party and its various organisations was effected.

In Western democracies communist parties traditionally recruited mainly from the most disadvantaged social categories³² for whom the party functioned as "an important and even irreplaceable agent of political socialisation"³³, compensating for their social, educational and cultural handicaps. This was particularly important in the case of the French Communist Party: first, because the majority of PCF activists came from the lower social classes; and second, because the party's "particular and rigid world view" (Marxism-Leninism) had to be taught in order to maintain ideological unity between "*le communisme des intellectuels*" and "*le communisme des militants de la base*".³⁴ Through political education, the PCF sought to control both groups. In the case of the former, the leadership had to ensure that the ability of the intellectuals to innovate and criticise would remain within the limits set by the official party line.³⁵ According to a former French communist party member, a good communist leader needs "enough intelligence to take the initiative in the carrying-out of orders, but not enough intelligence to question those orders".³⁶ As for the militants, they had to be provided

with political training which would enable them to integrate the political and cultural world of communism and help them internalise the objectives of the party.³⁷

The element of “continuity” (that is to say, the training schools as a continuing aspect of the daily processes of the political education of a cadre) was the leitmotiv running through the communist pedagogy. The fact that communist theory was being constantly applied and tested in action meant that the Communist had to be continually studying and learning. The concept of the “unity of theory and practice” also demanded that there be no separation between training and party life. In communist party practice every activity therefore had some pedagogical value, be it reading or selling the party press, attending meetings, participating in campaigns, demonstrations or strikes, and so on. According to the head of the Central Division of Cadres of the Italian Communist Party in 1952, a “good Communist”, in order to have a “complete” political education, had to go through three stages of schooling: first, he had to “participate in the working-class struggle and that of people of all backgrounds”. Second, a Communist had to “constantly be present at party and union meetings, where the mass struggle is set out, with experience and results discussed”. The third stage of political education comprised “study of every kind, attendance at party school and courses and all personal application to the study of the classics of Marxism-Leninism”.³⁸ The student’s general political socialisation into the party - through cell meetings, campaigns, selling of the party publications and all other party activities - thus controlled his time and movements, whereas his specific political education additionally exercised control upon his thought and thinking process, making his commitment total as he prepared to enter the inner circles of the party.

The party schools were therefore not intended to be divorced from the general process of moulding cadres but rather to complete this process. Their importance lay in the fact that in that process they occupied key points, “nodes of intense development”.³⁹ Kriegel emphasises that “these schools were not centres for the formulation of doctrine or for research”,⁴⁰ they were intended purely “for the cadres, unswervingly dedicated to the training of political leaders needed by the party”, to mould professionals, or in the Leninist sense of the term, “professional revolutionaries”.⁴¹ In the words of Meyer, in

order to succeed in their aim of creating “perfect cadres”, the schools were to “eradicate every vestige of non-Communist beliefs and to replace them by the Marxist-Leninist ideology; to implement the psychological transformation of the person into a *Communist* person; to emphasise the unity of theory and practice; to utilise pressure, intellectual and psychological, as the decisive tool of training; and in climax, to inculcate a final and absolute loyalty to the Party as the final and sacred agent and executor of History”.⁴²

A measure of the high importance attached to the training schools is demonstrated by the way in which the students were selected. The selection process was carried out directly by the leading committees of the party echelon immediately below that on which the training school was to be conducted; and the ratification (or rejection) of nominations was decided by the leading organs of the echelon at whose level the school was organised.⁴³ Kriegel underlines the fact that the students “were not volunteers”.⁴⁴ According to Marcel Rosette, who directed the PCF’s central schools in 1956-63, at a given point during their party career, ‘promising’ militants were simply “told to do the schools”.⁴⁵ The suitable candidates had already been socialised into the party and their recruitment to party schools was based on the manifestation of leadership capacity and considerable experience in organisational work. They had thus been “tested and observed in action” and found to demonstrate complete attachment and loyalty to the party. A working-class background, trade union work (preferably in large enterprise) and elective mandates were also important in the selection process. The fact that the students could not “just volunteer” for party training did not mean that they were without motivation - quite the opposite. Predominantly, “going to school” was considered as a “mission”, an honour and a responsibility.⁴⁶ During their period of political training, the students also expected to learn more about the party and Marxism to help them in the “fight against social injustice and poverty”, and to gain personal goals in the field of self-development (“*un épanouissement personnel*”).⁴⁷ Without exception, political education was not seen “officially” as an avenue to a career since “careerism” and “promotion” were considered as dirty words.⁴⁸

For all that, attendance in party schools offered distinct rewards. As Offerlé puts it, if the division of political work often seems to the outsider “*une domination sans partage*

des dirigeants sur les dirigés”, it is possible only because those who are dominated are satisfied with the advantages they are drawing from the situation.⁴⁹ For most students, participation in party training schools opened up opportunities which were more satisfactory than those that were available outside.⁵⁰ In many ways, trained militants had a chance to succeed socially on the basis of “unconventional” criteria which required no particular technical proficiency or scholarly attainment. As a large proportion of the students came from a working-class background, many of them came to owe their entire political, educational and cultural progress to the party and its teachings.⁵¹ In socio-cultural terms, “quitting production” and becoming a party functionary, a “*militant de la plume*”⁵² or an “*artisan de l’histoire*”,⁵³ frequently meant a new life dedicated to previously unknown intellectual activities: reading, writing, discussion, a “life enriched and stimulated by people and events”.⁵⁴ These were the functionaries whose importance for the party apparatus as the implementors of democratic centralism was underlined in Chapter 1. They occupied diverse functions at different levels of the apparatus and had come to depend on the party, directly or indirectly, for their livelihood and prospects. In return for their material security, they accepted the need for conformism, ideological prudence and unwavering loyalty to the party;⁵⁵ to such people, indoctrination would appear as liberation rather than restriction. They were the equivalent of Lenin’s “army of professional revolutionaries”, an inner circle founded upon the official duties performed within the party. In the words of Duverger, their existence had created “a bureaucracy, an oligarchy ... which exercised power, retained it and transmitted it by means of co-option”.⁵⁶

In the French Communist Party, the bureaucratic oligarchy assumed the form of “technocratic oligarchy” which meant that in principle, the courses organised for the party cadre had to be attended before they could expect a post of leadership.⁵⁷ A training period therefore almost invariably led to an increase in responsibility and a higher or permanent status in the party apparatus or its various mass organisations and movements, thus registering a distinct advance in the student’s party situation.⁵⁸ Although any accurate measurement of any outcomes of formal political instruction in terms of political and career advancement is a virtually impossible task (it would necessitate access to party membership records and, in the case of the higher cadre, to

their highly confidential “biographies”), interviews with the PCF’s former education chiefs and central school directors (Etienne Fajon,⁵⁹ Francette Lazard, Marcel Rosette, Charles Fiterman, Nicholas Pasquarelli, Henri Martin, Jean-François Rivière and Lucien Bossu) established that attendance in party schools undoubtedly contributed to progress in the party - indeed, for certain cadre levels it was a strict requirement (naturally, all the PCF’s central school directors fulfilled this criterion; their backgrounds will be discussed in the subsequent chapters). This was also confirmed by all former students who were interviewed: each stage of their schooling coincided with a move to a more responsible or higher position. According to Lavabre, who has researched the cadre profiles of the Paris Federation during the period 1965-77 (the Paris federation was the largest PCF federation in France at that time), the more important the federation, the more rigorous was the training of cadres: “*La scolarisation au sein des écoles du Parti est la règle.*”⁶⁰ (In 1977, only 15% of the federal cadres in Paris had *not* attended a party school at central level.⁶¹) In addition, Elleinstein records that out of the 1522 delegates who participated in the PCF’s 22nd Congress in 1976, only 283 had not attended any party training school.⁶²

Unlike other types of parties (such as *partis d'intérimaires* or *partis de patronage*⁶³), mass parties or *partis de militants* have rarely been in a position to reward their collaborators in financial terms or by means of patronage, and have therefore had to develop other types of rewards in order to retain their support.⁶⁴ Thus, the rigid organisational hierarchy of the Communist party was in fact a pre-requisite for the system of rewards⁶⁵ of a mass party (which the PCF became in the mid-1930s). Gaxie points out that one of the notable characteristics of these parties is the proliferation of their closely-linked hierarchic echelons;⁶⁶ indeed, in his Report to the PCF’s 16th Congress Georges Marchais claimed that “... [with our] thirty thousand members responsible for cells, 25 000 section leaders, 3300 federal leaders, with our 1400 mayors, 21 000 municipal councillors and 150 departmental councillors ... with our tens of thousands of communists responsible for mass organisations and movements, we have cadres totalling more than 100 000!”⁶⁷ In the structured training system (schooling began at the elementary level for newcomers, sharpened its focus at the intermediate federal or district level, and culminated in the central schools, with high-fliers often

completing their education in the Soviet Union) each training level attended at the various stages of a person's party career therefore usually represented an initiation into a new level of responsibility and authority, and directly responded to the needs of the hierarchical party organisation. In the Communist party, the possibility of advancement therefore essentially played the same role as does the social mobility of the elite in society; militance reinforced with theoretical training thus offered an even more effective channel for self-realisation.⁶⁸ To this must be added that the nature of the rewards could also be merely symbolic and psychological (affection, admiration, prestige),⁶⁹ sometimes just a matter of being able to quench one's *soif d'apprendre* - a theme that would reoccur time and time over again in the personal testimonies of former teachers and students of the PCF training schools. In their case, political education became "a means of transforming [one's] orientation to life from a simple passive acceptance of their surroundings to the excitements of intellectual mastery",⁷⁰ a satisfaction of acting in accordance with one's convictions.⁷¹

During the learning period, then, through cognitive and affective processes (all political socialisation includes an affective component, the inculcation of love, loyalty and respect, and usually negative feelings of differing types for other political systems),⁷² the student was expected to gradually internalise as his 'own' the party's political norms. In other words, he became increasingly politically socialised. The teaching about the party's history, its heroes, its traditions and its contributions to the nation and the country further enhanced the student's partisan pride and identity.⁷³ This and the reading of carefully prescribed popular literature (Soviet novels, short stories and reportage of Soviet life as well as films) not only fostered emotional links between the students themselves but also between them and their "heroic and glorious Soviet comrades" and the entire international communist family.⁷⁴ The very real physical isolation from home and family during the prolonged study period (one to six months in France, up to two years in the Soviet Union) was compensated by the fraternal atmosphere of the training establishments. This further fostered emotional dependency and encouraged bonding, thus contributing to the creation of a tight-knit core of loyal party activists. As will be seen in the subsequent chapters, the "total school experience" - lectures, classes, group debates and discussions (conducive to attitude forming), personal study periods (likely

to develop self-discipline), the communal meals and celebrations, periods of “organised relaxation” and sports, excursions, practical work sessions, relations between students and instructors (instructors were often set up as “models of behaviour” and mentors), and so on - was a carefully planned exercise, the purpose of which was the reinforcement of the students’ emotional attachment to each other and to the party. The training schools in fact reproduced a miniature version of the communist counter-community where a small group of people, put together for a specific purpose “bonded” and formed strong (sometimes life-long) attachments. In this controlled environment, another indispensable psychological tool of the communist pedagogical methodology was put to use: this was “criticism and self-criticism”, the “prodding, and delving examination of intellectual and psychological motive”,⁷⁵ which was to be constantly learned and practised in party schools. It had its place among the other fundamental educational instruments and constituted a definite ritual of continuous testing. However, Meyer’s reference to the extremely rigorous form of self-criticism concerns mainly the Komintern schools and some cadre schools organised in the USA in the 1950s; in the case of the PCF, this is not supported by the available evidence. However, as will be seen in the subsequent chapters, a milder form of criticism and self-criticism was practised in the French schools also: this practice commenced at the beginning of the school with each new intake of students having to take an inventory of their own motives and expectations;⁷⁶ continued throughout the training process; and culminated at the end of the school period when students presented an evaluation of the school, of the teachers, of their own experience and of their own transformation into a “communist person”.⁷⁷

Thus, the students became politically socialised not only through the deliberate orientation of the teaching dispensed, but also through their entire holistic learning experience. It is obvious that acquisition of earlier political socialisation on the emotional level had already acted as a suitable springboard for what was a further enhancement in the form of specific political training for carefully selected people. If political socialisation had begun in childhood, had been strengthened through peer groups, in work and trade union related activities and party work, members had already been integrated into a certain subculture where they had learnt to “manage” their lives

in accordance with communist values and standards. In fact, it was a precondition of formal political instruction that its recipients should have already been exposed to some or all of the above mentioned agents of socialisation. The subsequent formal instruction provided to a “chosen” group of people by the party schools was the final piece in the jigsaw that made up the fully trained and politically socialised cadre; as Meyer puts it, the schools “in their artificial intensity were the forcing beds”⁷⁸ of that process.

The function of Scientific Marxism in political education

Maurice Thorez wrote in his autobiography *“Fils du peuple”*: *“La doctrine scientifique Marx-Engels-Lénine-Staline, la théorie révolutionnaire du Marxisme-Léninisme est une boussole permettant de fixer à coup sûr la route de la classe ouvrière.”*⁷⁹ At this stage it is therefore important to give some thought to the function of the science of Marxism in the programme of political education for party members and activists.

One of the objectives of communist indoctrination was the mastery of the science of Marxism-Leninism and the ability to use the dialectic in order to arrive at the correct decisions in any situation. For this reason, Marxism-Leninism became an article of faith, and communist parties justified their leadership of working classes on the grounds that only the party was completely “immersed in the science of Marxism-Leninism”.⁸⁰ “Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This cannot be insisted upon too strongly,” wrote Lenin in *“What is to be done?”*.⁸¹ A communist party could only fulfil its task as the leader and vanguard of the proletariat if it scrupulously followed the teachings of Lenin. This, then, made the trained militant an individual with a mission and with systematic knowledge - an interpreter and a teacher of the theory. Thanks to his theoretical training and his practical experience in applying the theory in the field, the militant was able to “make correct judgements, forecast the future, never lose sight of his goals and never give way to irrelevant feelings”.⁸²

What gave the theory its real weight and importance was the fact that it was considered as “scientific” - the only true science of society.⁸³ The task of the communists was not to search for factual knowledge, as that had already been achieved. Rather, their task and

mission was to teach the science of Marxism and Marxist analysis. The Soviet view traditionally relied on that element of Leninism which, albeit briefly (*What is to be done?*) stressed the party's vanguard role, i.e. its guidance of the working class, based at least partly on its superior understanding of Marxism. When the Party came to power it became the institutional incarnation of Marxism-Leninism, and its "propagandists" and "agitators" were the experts in conveying this "scientific truth". Almond compares the approach of the Communist to "his science" to that of the priest to "his theology": the science never changes, it is only "enriched" and "interpreted". That way, communist theory was never considered as "wrong": it was constantly tested in action and amplified or modified ("enriched") according to needs and circumstances.⁸⁴ This, then, was the "unity of theory and practice".

Who could then be trusted to "enrich" the theory? In truth, a very small number of people were worthy of this task: "It may be said without fear or exaggeration that since the death of Engels, the master theoretician Lenin, and after Lenin, Stalin and other disciples of Lenin have been the *only* Marxists who have advanced Marxist theory and who have enriched it with new experience in new conditions of the class struggle of the proletariat," declared Stalin in the "*History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (B)*".⁸⁵ Stalin's definition conveniently gave wide latitude to communist party leaderships who therefore were "legitimised to enrich" Marxism. As a result, leaderships appropriated the right to all ideological primacy: the leaders became ideologues, as well as already being interpreters and teachers.⁸⁶ The "knowledge" became therefore a powerful and versatile tool for complete control of the political training system and by extension, for the maintenance of the authority of the leadership. Only the communist leadership could profess certainty about many uncertain things; only the leadership trained in this "supreme blend of art and science"⁸⁷ could comprehend the true political essence.

By implication, then, communist theory had to be studied and mastered. This process came in three stages: first, the militant studied the theory; second, he applied it in practice; third, he learned from the experience.⁸⁸ After that, he in his turn, had to assume the political education of the working classes and the development of its class

consciousness (*"What is to be done?"*). Therefore the party - the "informed elite" of the working class - was able to legitimise its *raison d'être* as the creator of the elusive "communist person", the end product of political education whose mastery of Marxism-Leninism implied total devotion to the party.

Traditionally, communist training courses consisted of three main levels based on the Soviet model. At the basic level, there were the elementary schools designed for the members and militants of the cells to equip them with the rudiments of Marxist theory and party organisation through a series of weekly evening classes. At the next level, residential district (or federation) schools were organised for party cadres over a one or two-week period, usually in a boarding-school environment. Their purpose was to add to the basic knowledge already acquired in order to enable the militants to be active at middle levels of the party apparatus. At the apex of the school system were the central schools organised at national level, with courses generally lasting between one and four months. The central schools were for cadres already trained at lower levels and who already held responsible positions at district or departmental level; these schools were also important for promotion in the party. In addition to the national training schools, "promising" cadres were also sent to the higher party training establishments in the USSR and other socialist countries.⁸⁹

Apart from the organisational aspects outlined above, there were important similarities in the curricula of all communist party schools; the essential features of these had been derived from the Soviet model set up in the 1920s and developed over the years. Since the purpose of the training schools was to provide a firm foundation of communist belief, the central themes taught were traditionally uniform, with the exception of specific national issues. The main subjects taught by all schools were Marxist economics ("political economy"); Marxist philosophy ("historic and dialectic materialism"); political theory consisting of Marxism-Leninism together with the history of the CPSU (up to the 1960s with national variations); history of the Communist Party in question and of the labour movement; and special courses in organisational practice and techniques. Text books generally included the classics of Marx, Engels, Lenin and (until 1956) Stalin, and works by national party leaders as well as congress resolutions and

decisions of the party leadership. Indeed, the following quotation could have been taken from any Communist Party educational publication at almost any time: "The aim of our educational work is to impart to our members an understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory, but in such a way as to make it real and living, a meaningful guide and help in their practice, to their political activity in the new, complicated conditions of today. This we must seek to do by treating fundamental principles correctly, developing from them what is familiar, thus leading our comrades to a deeper understanding of the relevance of Marxist-Leninist theory to this actual struggle in which we are engaged."⁹⁰

"On ne naît pas communiste, on le devient": the "ideal Communist"

The Communist is made, not born. Having now examined the "moulding process", we need to consider what kind of end product it aimed to turn out. One of the most important functions of the party training system was to select potential cadres and mould them into trustworthy party militants who would serve in the party's middle and top apparatus.⁹¹ Intrinsic to such moulding was a definition of the militant: what was expected of him, how he could best serve the party, and what political beliefs, expectations and behaviours were considered desirable. At the point of recruitment and entrance into the movement, the communist party presented the new members with an exclusive and explicit model, a model which in reality did not exist - even though the parties always had in their midst historical or fictional persons who were depicted as realisations of that model.⁹² The intention was gradually to develop the "ideal Communist" from the raw material of recruits and the rank-and-file of the party. However, the purpose of political education was not to radically change attitudes or behaviours, nor to produce too sophisticated an end product - the main intention was simply to create continuity and homogeneity. In the following section we shall attempt to construct an "identikit" of this "ideal Communist" created from the raw material through the training process and the testing in action which singled out those who had the necessary qualities and potentialities.

What, then, should one look for in recreating the image of the “perfect Communist”? Almond suggests that the ideal image of the communist militant is a kind of hybrid influenced by both Western European and Russian models.⁹³ This is a logical conclusion bearing in mind the origins of the creators of Marxism and Leninism-Stalinism. The image of the socialist or communist militant in Marx was that of a leader, guide and organiser of the proletariat, of an individual who educated the working class in its function of conquering political power. The militant described by Marx and Engels had much in common with the later Leninist and Stalinist doctrinal conception, but also differed in many fundamental ways. Almond explains that revolutionary militants in both Marxism and Leninism-Stalinism were conceived as “scientific socialists” acting in full knowledge of the laws of history and the social process. They were above all “rational calculators” of the various means available to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat. They were the “vanguard of the working class”, good organisers and tacticians. Their allegiance was to the international proletariat and not to their own nation; they were the builders of the new, humane society. The legitimate goal was the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class, and for this, a good party member had to be able to clarify, prepare and lead the working class from its present condition - anytime, anywhere - to the seizure of political power.

But there were also differences between the Marxist and Leninist models. Marx’s conception of the party was not sharply differentiated from the conception of the proletariat: the leadership would differ in degree, not in kind, from the rest of the proletariat. Lenin’s communist militant, on the other hand, was considered a very special type of person, a member of a kind of aristocracy, sharing an esoteric knowledge which the average proletarian could not digest. Only the militants - who “knew” - could effectively evaluate situations and then proceed to apply the correct Marxist-Leninist analysis to them, whereas the simple proletarian needed to be guided by the initiated elite. In the words of Guralsky, the Komintern’s delegate in France in 1924, “The armour of a revolutionary party must comprise a vast network of professional revolutionaries.”⁹⁴

There were further differences: according to Almond, in Lenin only the communist

militant could be a full-time revolutionary, dedicated to a professional revolutionary calling; in Marx, the revolutionary leadership differentiated from the generalised activism among the proletariat only by a more correct sense of direction and a greater degree of activism. But the most important difference between the two militant models was in the domain of organisation. In Marx, the leaders were involved in vague and undefined organising activity: in addition to the party, they also organised vast proletarian groups such as trade unions, study circles, etc. Lenin on the other hand held the militant to be part of a highly disciplined and centralised party which in its turn was responsible for organising other social formations into dependent, manipulable “transmission-belt” groups.

These special features of the Leninist militant model were largely the result of specifically Russian influence, and they were much contested both by the more westernised moderate Russian socialists and within the international movement. Almond correctly states that it was this Russian component of Leninism - Leninism which he views as a “marriage of Marxism with the extreme Russian revolutionary current” - which was finally responsible for that explicitness, exclusiveness and extraordinary emphasis on tactics which forms part of the baggage of the communist militant.

What is a cadre?

The next area to examine in getting closer to the image of the “ideal Communist” is the function and position of the communist party cadre since it was the specially selected, trained and indoctrinated cadre who personified the image of the perfect militant.

The cadres formed the core within the formal communist parties, and they represented Lenin’s “organisation of professional revolutionaries”.⁹⁵ In “*What is to be done?*”, Lenin clarified his ideas: there must be a “dozen tried and talented leaders... professionally trained, schooled by long experience and working in perfect harmony such as were not born by the hundreds”.⁹⁶ They had to be “men who devote their entire lives, and not simply their free evenings, to the revolution”.⁹⁷ This special group of trained and dedicated people was going to be a professional army, an army of cadres adapted for the

non-military warfare of the 20th century: "We must have 'our own men' ... everywhere, among all social strata, and in all positions from which we can learn the inner springs of the state mechanism. Such men are required for propaganda and agitation, but in a still larger measure for organisations."⁹⁸ The Bolshevik conception of leadership was that of the general staff of an army; Lenin frequently spoke of the party being the "general staff" of the working class.⁹⁹ Stalin, too, was extremely fond of military metaphors: at a Central Committee Plenum in March 1937, he divided the party into leaders and the led. There were 3,000-4,000 senior leaders, the "generals"; 30,000-40,000 middle-rank officials making up the "officer corps"; and the 100,000-150,000 lower-level leaders who were the "NCOs".¹⁰⁰

However, not everybody was eligible for this kind of organisation - recruits had to be carefully selected. "A working man who is at all talented and 'promising' must not be left to work eleven hours a day in a factory," wrote Lenin in *What is to be done?*¹⁰¹ Yet, Lenin insisted that the proletariat was not to form the whole of the new political elite as priority was to be given to intellectuals: even though, in order to create a homogeneous "army", "all distinctions between workers and intellectuals must be dropped".¹⁰² Thus, the heterogeneous recruits were, after training and moulding, to constitute a new social and human type, bound by military obedience to a general staff which decided every change of tactics. These selected people in their turn would select others, and wherever they penetrated, from trade unions to the most harmless looking formations, there would be the "small compact nucleus, which uses the host for its own ends".¹⁰³

Writing in the PCF's theoretical journal *Cahiers du bolchevisme* (later *Cahiers du communisme*) in 1948, Marcel Servin, the secretary of the PCF's Cadre Committee, described the function of the cadre as follows:

*"They [cadres] are communists who have emerged from the mass of the party members and have distinguished themselves in terms of struggle, devotion, and foresight, and who have been chosen to assume responsibilities within the party organisations; who are active (militants) and trusted by party members."*¹⁰⁴

The prevailing political situation determined what kind of cadres were needed at any

given moment. Although the cadres formed the party elite, they were not necessarily recognisable by a title or in positions of organisational leadership. In communist-speak, a cadre was someone who was “trained and ready to do anything, anywhere, for communism”; the party “could not exist without its permanent and solid cadres, without a certain continuity which would survive people and tactics. [The party] must be able to count on the loyalty of its leading militants. When all is said and done, the party is only as good as its militants.”¹⁰⁵

A three-lesson booklet published in 1948 by the Communist Party of Great Britain described the role of the cadre much in the same way:

“Who are our cadres? And how can we develop them? Our existing Party cadres are all those members who accept some responsibility, however small, for the carrying out of Party policy and leadership. But the extent and quality of the Party leadership depends on the extent to which we develop and train thousand of new cadres. [...] The qualities we seek to develop are loyalty and devotion to the Party, contact with the people, the ability to work with the people and support for our policy as well as recruit to the Party, and self-reliance and initiative. [...] Cadres must be trained. [...] Without strengthening their grasp of scientific socialism, members will not develop their conviction and loyalty to the Party.”¹⁰⁶

In his *Questions of Leninism*, Stalin depicted cadres as the

*“men who have the correct party line, who understand it, consider it as their own political line, are ready to apply it, know how to implement it and are capable of bearing the responsibility for doing so, of defending it, of fighting for it - without which the political line is in danger of remaining only on paper”.*¹⁰⁷

All this clearly fitted in with the Leninist idea of the Bolshevik party; from Lenin's theories on the revolutionary elite it also followed that if the revolution was to be made by a carefully selected, trained and indoctrinated elite, then that elite had to be schooled and educated in order to receive an adequate ideological and organisational training.¹⁰⁸ This was particularly important at those periods when the communist parties were ‘opening up’; i.e. when there was an influx of new - mainly young - members (after the Liberation, for example, 75% of the PCF was composed of new members¹⁰⁹).

It was often said that every Communist already had an “unshakeable conviction of a special calling”. This comes out in a particularly striking way in a remarkable speech delivered by Stalin on the eve of Lenin’s funeral 26th January 1924.¹¹⁰ In this passage Stalin emphasised the specificity of the communist person:

*“We Communists are people of a special mould. We are made of special material. We are those who comprise the army of the great proletarian strategist, the army of Comrade Lenin. There is nothing higher than the honour to belong to this army. There is nothing higher than the title of member of the Party founded and led by Lenin. It is not given to all to be members of such a party. It is not given to all to withstand the stress and storm that accompanies membership in such a party. In departing from us, comrade Lenin has bequeathed to us the duty of holding aloft and guarding the purity of the great title of member of the Party.”*¹¹¹

But if the members of the communist party already were people of a “special mould”, then the cadres had to be even more special: “men of steel, hard, inflexible, rapier edged” like Stalin (the word *stal* in Russian means ‘steel’).¹¹² All militants had to therefore strive towards the “ideal image” and many guidelines directed the communist parties in their choice of cadres.

In the PCF, Marcel Servin outlined in 1949 the political qualities necessary for communist cadres considered for promotion:¹¹³

First, the cadres had to demonstrate devotion and loyalty to the Party, the working class and the nation, tested in the face of the enemy (in battle, prison, court, etc.); second, they had to show initiative and a sense of responsibility, i.e. the ability to find one’s bearings independently and not be afraid of assuming responsibility in decision-making;¹¹⁴ third, qualities such as political solidness, the courage necessary to implement the party line, and a spirit of intransigence toward all deviation in the party were considered essential; fourth, the cadres were expected to be bold and courageous, ready to face difficulties without fear or struggle. Finally, all communist cadres had to have the closest possible contacts with the masses and the ability to convince, organise and lead the masses. (Stalin had also expressed this requirement in the following terms: “I think that the Bolsheviks remind us of the hero of the Greek mythology, Antaeus. They, like Antaeus,

are strong because they maintain connection with their mother, who gave birth to them, suckled them and reared them. And as long as they maintain connection with their mother, with the people, they have every chance of remaining invincible.”¹¹⁵)

As for personal aptitudes of the communist cadre, it was only possible to detect them if the party knew the cadres or the potential cadres intimately, studied their qualities and failings in order to find the most suitable post for the militant in question. Maurice Thorez put it in more concrete terms: “One must not entrust the editorship of a newspaper to a militant who is a capable organiser but who writes badly or with difficulty; nor must one entrust organisational work to a comrade who may well be an excellent propagandist but a hopeless organiser.”¹¹⁶ That is why those in charge had to have “thorough knowledge” of each and every militant before proposing a candidate for promotion.

How, then, were cadres selected for promotion? Servin advocated a continuous, systematic process of observation and supervision of the cadres, carried out not only by their superior echelons but also by the mass of the party members. Particularly indispensable in the selection process was a “useful criticism” of the failings and errors of the militant aspiring to promotion. The purpose of this criticism was to stamp out all signs of any *amour propre* which would only lead to more mistakes: “Fraternal but serious criticism of errors committed enriches the serious and devoted militant. [...] It also reveals any ‘unstable element’ to whom it would be risky to entrust responsibilities.”¹¹⁷ The inability to accept criticism was therefore considered a serious shortcoming.

It is interesting to note that, despite the straightforward and seemingly clear-cut instructions concerning the development and promotion of cadres, there remained obstacles blocking the selection process. Servin lamented the reluctance to promote young cadres and women (he criticised in particular the generally poor effort made to send women to central schools, the shortage of working-class cadres [sic] as well as the damaging effects of *copinerie* or non-political criteria in cadre development).¹¹⁸

The perfect cadre: an example of the “ideal Communist”

Following the brief outline given above in which we examined the principal qualities and characteristics required of the “ideal Communist” and the “perfect cadre”, it is only appropriate to take a look at a representative of this rare and special race. As stated previously, we must be quite clear that the ideal type never existed in real life but had to be invented and created as a model toward which militants should strive. In France this model - for thirty decisive years of party history - was Maurice Thorez.

Thorez’s autobiography *Fils du peuple* gives clear guidelines as to what characteristics and qualities *un homme communiste* should possess, and how Thorez came to fulfil these criteria. The image of the “perfect Communist” did not exist only for the edification and inspiration of the rank and file; it was an essential element in the everyday lives of all cadres, and was drawn upon in party schools at all levels. Maurice Thorez fitted - and was made to fit - the ideal image more than any other French Communist (an image, which was clearly carefully constructed on the basis of Stalin’s personality cult, as is shown by Bernard Pudal who has analysed the presentation and packaging of both Stalin and Thorez¹¹⁹).

Fils du peuple was published in 1937 and it was intended to contribute to the promotion of Thorez’s growing cult of personality. However, the main emphasis of the work is, as Pudal points out, on the very “ordinariness” of Maurice Thorez: he is presented simply as the “product of history in which he is immersed”¹²⁰, namely that of the French people in general and that of the working class in particular. Thorez becomes the “people’s representative” only through his own hard work, which makes his achievements unique and at the same time ordinary, and thus attainable by any communist militant willing to follow the same path. Pudal notes that Thorez’s qualities are nothing more than the best qualities of his class; his experience has been gained in his own social milieu through its dramas and struggles; his encyclopaedic knowledge is the result of personal study and systematic training. *Fils du peuple* is therefore presented as the complete apprenticeship manual for the aspiring communist militant.¹²¹

However, *Fils du peuple* was never an autobiography as such. As usual with the Party's image-building propaganda projects, any dubious elements had been omitted or glossed over. The work was purely for party propaganda purposes: in Pudal's words, Thorez "lends his personality to an exemplary trajectory, that of the political promotion of a working-class communist militant".¹²² Underlined once more is the fact that Thorez's life is no different from the personal social history shared by all communist leaders whose trajectories are very similar to his.

How is Thorez portrayed in his autobiography? First of all, he naturally fulfils the most essential requirement of the perfect militant by being of working-class origin, "*fils et petit-fils de mineur*", the "*fils du peuple* with no specific distinctive features (as yet). But the people he lived with were no ordinary people: they were "*un peuple militant*", with his grandfather a "*militant modeste, courageux, irréprochable et fidèle*".¹²³

Another significant feature was Thorez's insatiable hunger for learning. Pudal quotes from *Fils du peuple*: "I passed my primary school certificate. [...] I came first." Later, after having been forced to leave school early to find work, Thorez never ceased to regret that he had not been able to continue his formal education; this led him to methodically explore every area of knowledge through a veritable programme of self-education: "I started my education by reading *abundantly* ... I was *devouring* ... I read Marx and Engels again *in their entirety* ... So that I could read Marx and Engels *in the original language*, I decided to learn German of which I already had some basic notions ..."¹²⁴ Thorez also learned Russian and Latin and systematically read all the essential works of French classical literature. The key words in all his endeavours were "*maîtrise de soi*", "*soif d'apprendre*" and "*discipline de soi absolument déterminée*".¹²⁵ There is a very illustrative passage in Pudal's book which describes the way in which Thorez worked:

[...] In the mornings, Thorez studied his dossiers and read. [...] He enjoyed his conversations with Picasso, Aragon, Eluard and other intellectuals ("his interlocutors did not often have the last word"). He paid meticulous attention to detail: when writing speeches, he always wrote with a pen and corrected type-written scripts again and again - even at the point of delivering a speech, he was still correcting. "Work well done" was one of

his favourite expressions. He would not "suffer mediocrity, slovenliness [...] everything about him was meticulously organised". Thorez's secretaries (Cogniot, Joannes, Dupuy - all with a good educational background¹²⁶) praised his energy, his obstinacy, his insistence on precision, his refusal of all vulgarity, his seriousness and punctuality. Thorez hated "empty phrases, slovenliness, all Bohemian way of life".¹²⁷

Furthermore, Thorez naturally had a close contact with the masses and identified with the working classes and peasants. He was also portrayed as a combative militant, orator and propagandist, absolutely loyal and devoted to the Party and his class, to the point of sacrificing his freedom to the cause.¹²⁸ By 1931, Maurice Thorez's "personal courage had led him to the leadership of the PCF".¹²⁹

Pudal has analysed other, equally interesting and typical itineraries of militants¹³⁰ which might also have been chosen to describe the "ideal Communist". The important thing to remember, however, is that *none of the official biographies bears any resemblance to the real lives of the persons whose trajectories they narrate*. Pudal points out very clearly the contradictions, omissions and downright lies which were used to construct all official biographies based on the PCF's system of values.¹³¹ Even before the publication of *Fils du peuple*, Marcel Cachin had set out the main qualities of the "model Communist" in a small booklet called "*Nos 72!*" which consisted of the brief biographies of the PCF's 72 deputies and senators after the victorious 1936 legislative elections. All information was carefully selected and Cachin's abstract gives the general drift of each biography: the model militant stems from the people; as a deputy, he serves the people and is its voice in parliament because he is the people's legitimate and deserving son, a son whose destiny bears the scars of battle in which his qualities were forged.¹³²

Conclusion

This chapter focused primarily on the moulding process for communist cadres. We first examined the process of political socialisation in general and one specific instrument of that process in particular, namely political education. It was shown that purposive socialisation acted as an induction into a certain political culture, whereby an

indoctrinated individual was equipped with the tools needed for survival and participation within that culture. Political socialisation into the party was also shown to take care of the management and control of an individual's time and movements. Political education on the other hand was designed as an additional tool which would work on and control the person's - the cadre's - mind, his thoughts and thinking processes, thus committing him ever deeper to the cause and to loyalty to the party. This commitment was further secured by both material and psychological (symbolic) rewards bestowed on the graduate of a party training school. The crucial importance of the party political education system as the refining touch in the entire process of moulding a cadre was thus established.

We then continued with a short analysis of the function of scientific Marxism in the communist political system. The importance of 'going to school' was further enhanced by the 'scientific' nature of Marxism: it was seen that as a "true science of society", and gave the political education programme intellectual credence and a theoretical foundation of the required gravity. Its theoreticians, teachers and interpreters were embodied in the communist party leadership which thus came to exercise complete authority and total control over the political training system. In this system the students became the grateful recipients of a scientific way of thinking which equipped them with the qualifications self-esteem necessary for a new life style within the party apparatus and its mass organisations. Their "scientific" training and advancement in the party also made them less likely to abandon their commitment.

Finally, we set about examining the characteristics and qualities necessary for the "ideal Communist". To this end, various criteria and guidelines were studied in order to achieve an illustration of the desired end product, the definition of the "perfect" militant cadre. The persons who approximated to this ideal constituted a distinct elite group of people within the Communist party, and it was found that they shared number of basic qualities and characteristics: in fact, the "perfect model" had to have almost unlimited versatility in order to tow the present party line and yet quickly adjust to changes in it. Thorez's exemplary trajectory contained all the necessary ingredients, which transformed him from a working-class Communist militant into the leader of his party

and a Minister of State and made him the legendary hero in whom all the qualities imagined in the perfect Communist combined. Thorez was unique but at the same time ordinary, part of a select, elite group, a professional revolutionary who was confident in the final triumph of communism.

However, what emerges from this analysis of the “ideal model” is an extremely complicated picture. As already noted above, it is unrealistic to expect that any one individual should possess a fully comprehensive set of the desired qualities. Nevertheless, the basic analytical model of the “ideal Communist” which we have constructed from communist doctrine will prove useful in a number of ways in the later parts of this study. In particular, it will help us to understand a certain aspect of the PCF’s steady (albeit not always readily perceptible) decline as, for much too long, the criteria for the “ideal model” remained stuck in a time warp. An obvious example would be the disappearance of the professional revolutionary, who vanished in Western European democracies long ago. Nor did the “model” take into account the social changes that started to transform French society (among others) from the 1950s onwards when the *filles du peuple d’origine ouvrière* started to fade away. In the final analysis, the Soviet-created Bolshevik model existed for far too long; the conclusion must therefore be that since that model was the intended end result of party training, the political education system continued to insist on the marketability of an original prototype which was well beyond its sell-by-date.

Following this overview of the theoretical aspects of political education, the historical origins and early evolution of the PCF’s training system will constitute the principal theme of the next chapter. In the 1920s - the starting point of our account - all communist education was in its infancy, but the urgency to establish a proper system of party schools to provide systematic and organised political education had already made itself felt in the Soviet Union. This system was soon to be exported to other communist parties world-wide.

Notes and references

1. DERVILLE. & CROISAT, *op. cit.*, p. 761 This study was carried out in three party cells (one factory cell and two local cells in urban areas) in Grenoble in three consecutive years, 1977, 1978 and 1979.
2. ARAGON, L., *Les Yeux et la Mémoire*, quoted in LAVAU, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
3. ALMOND, G.A. & COLEMAN, J.S. (Eds.), *The Politics of Developing Areas*. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1960), p. 27.
4. RUSH, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
5. See KAVANAGH, *Political science and Political Behaviour*, *op. cit.*, p. 62. See also JOIGNANT, A., 'La socialisation politique: stratégies d'analyse, enjeux théoriques et nouveaux agendas de recherche', in *Revue française de science politique*, octobre 1992, pp. 535-561: in his article, Joignant analyses the prevalent American behaviourist approaches to the processes of transmission of values and political beliefs from parents to children, and the research strategies which deal with the effect of "context", of the immersion of the individual in social "networks" or of particular historical conjunctures on attitudinal changes.
6. DAWSON & PREWITT, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-24.
7. KAVANAGH, *Political Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
8. HOLMES, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-3. See also ALMOND & COLEMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29. The authors discuss the parallel functions of latent and purposive (manifest) political socialisation as the child matures.
9. Dawson & Prewitt, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
10. ALMOND & COLEMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
11. BRZEZINSKI, Z. & HUNTINGDON, S. P., *Political Power: USA / USSR* (Columbia University, 1964), p. 84.
12. KAVANAGH, *Political Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
13. Ibid.
14. DURHAM HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.
15. BRZEZINSKI & HUNTINGDON, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
16. Ibid., p. XVII.
17. KATZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-38.
18. POPPER MICKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
19. HOLMES, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Holmes gives the example of a text from an English language textbook used in schools in the GDR: it lists various political bodies in the GDR, UK and USA - but selectively so that for example, the only British "parties and organisations" mentioned were the CPGB, the Labour Party, the YCL and trade unions.
20. DURHAM HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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21. KENEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
 22. BUCHHEIM, H., *Totalitarian Rule, its Nature and Characteristics* (Wesleyan University Press, Conneticut, 1968), p. 15.
 23. BRZEZINSKI & HUNTINGDON, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 24. DURHAM HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.
 25. *Cahiers du communisme*, janvier 1949, p. 96.
 26. See in particular KRIEGEL, *op. cit.*
 27. DERVILLE & CROISAT, *op. cit.*, p. 766. Derville & Croisat state that 66.3% of the new party members in their study came from a left-wing family (communist or non-communist) with 46% having at least one member of the family in the PCF.
 28. LAVAU, *A quoi sert le PCF*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
 29. For reasons why people join the Communist Party, see ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 224; and GAXIE, D., 'Economie des partis et rétributions du militantisme', *op. cit.*, pp. 143-147.
 30. DERVILLE & CROISAT, *op. cit.*, p. 760.
 31. PROPPER MICKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
 32. DERVILLE & CROISAT, *op. cit.*, p. 760.
 33. GAXIE, D., *Le cens caché*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.
 34. DERVILLE & CROISAT, *op. cit.*, p. 761. Here the authors quote Gramsci's analysis of the role of the Jesuits who attempted to prevent a community dividing into two groups, "that of the intellectuals and that of the simple souls". (See GRAMSCI, A., *Oeuvres choisies* (Paris, Editions sociales, 1959), p. 22.
 35. Ibid. This was done by "sanctioning doctrinal evolutions and bringing them in line with orthodoxy". See BON, F., 'Structure de l'idéologie communiste', in *Le communisme en France* (Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1969), p. 136.
 36. ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
 37. DERVILLE & CROISAT, *op. cit.*, p. 761.
 38. BELLASSAI, S., 'The Party as a School and Schools of Party. The Partito comunista italiano 1947-1956', *Paedagogica Historica*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1999, p. 68.
 39. MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
 40. KRIEGEL, *The French Communists*, *op. cit.*, p. 259-61.
 41. Ibid., p. 262.
 42. MEYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62.
 43. Thus, in the case of the PCF, students for the federal school were proposed by the cell or section committees and ratified by responsible federal bureaux. Students for the central schools were

nominated by federal committees and ratified by the Central Committee. Students for international schools in the USSR were selected by the Politbureau and ratified by the CPSU.

44. KRIEGEL, *The French Communists*, *op. cit.*, p. 264. Kriegel adds: "Had they been [volunteers], the schools would have been filled with worthy individuals but who nonetheless were not the right kind of people for the kind of work the schools were designed to perform."
45. Interview with Marcel Rosette 9.9.1991. In 1951, the Seine federation of the PCF sent the following letter to its section secretaries, members of the federal committee and political education chiefs: "*Le Secrétariat Fédéral a décidé que 3 Ecoles se tiendraient pendant la période des congés. [...] Nous vous demandons: 1) de faire parvenir, rapidement, à la Fédération, des candidatures pour chacune de ces écoles, en tenant compte que ces candidats doivent être recherchés parmi les meilleurs militants, et non parmi les volontaires; 2) Il est nécessaire que les directions de sections choisissent parmi les camarades qui se sont révélés pendant la campagne électorale et les luttes revendicatives et politiques ces derniers mois.*" (Archives Marty, Carton F-G, Dossier 8. CRHMSS, Université de Paris, 9 rue Malher, Paris 75004)
46. Interviews with Albert Coïc, 18.6.1991; Danièle Garnier, 25.11.1991; Claude Poperen, 1.4.1992; Michel Pouchin, 17.6.1991; Yannick Rauyer, 20.2.1992. See also KRIEGEL, *The French Communists*, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
47. See note 46.
48. Interview with Gérard Leneveu, 20.2.1992. Thus, Leneveu disputed the use of the word "promotion": "*Je n'aime pas ce terme! Dans le Parti, il n'y a pas de carriéristes!*" Yet, he had to admit: "*Cependant, chaque fois que je faisais écoles, on m'a monté dans le niveau des responsabilités.*"
49. OFFERLE, M., *Les partis politiques*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
50. GAXIE, D., 'Economie des parties et rétributions du militantisme', *op. cit.*, p. 136.
51. Ibid.
52. OFFERLE, *Les partis politiques*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
53. GAXIE, 'Economie des parties et rétributions du militantisme', *op. cit.*, p. 151.
54. KRIEGEL, *The French Communists*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
55. GAXIE, 'Economie des partis et rétributions du militantisme', *op. cit.*, p. 142. Antoine SPIRE gives a graphic description of his life after leaving the Party and losing his job at *Editions sociales*: "*J'ai connu le vide après le plein. L'angoisse d'une certaine inactivité, après l'angoisse d'un certain activisme. Après avoir eu chaud au sein de la famille communiste, j'ai eu peur d'avoir froid hors de la famille. [...] Du jour au lendemain, je me suis trouvé sans rien. Peur. On parle de chômage. Femme et enfants on souffert plus que de raison de cette rupture. Je me vois encore incapable de répondre à Nicolas mon fils aîné qui me demandait que faire figurer sur une circulaire d'école, après la mention profession du père ...* (SPIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 244).
56. DUVERGER, M., *Political Parties: their organisation activity in the modern state*. (Methuen, London, reprinted 1978), p. 155.
57. The system was first used by the Socialist parties in an attempt to form a political elite within the working class. See DUVERGER, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-56.
58. GAXIE, 'Economie des partis et rétribution du militantisme', *op. cit.*, pp. 128-30.

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59. Etienne Fajon writes in his autobiography: "*Je ne connais pas un seul dirigeant, à l'échelon fédéral ou supérieur, qui n'ait bénéficié de leur enseignement à un moment ou à l'autre.*" FAJON, E., *Ma vie s'appelle liberté* (Editions R. Laffont, Paris, 1976), p. 98.
60. Interview with Marie-Claire Lavabre, 13.9.1991.
61. LAVABRE, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
62. ELLEINSTEIN, J., *Le P.C.* (Grasset, Paris, 1976), p. 183.
63. See OFFERLE, *Les partis politiques, op. cit.*, pp. 48-9.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
65. GAXIE, 'Economie des partis et rétributions du militantisme', *op. cit.*, p. 131.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.
67. KRIEGEL, *The French Communists, op. cit.*, p. 188. Kriegel explains that the figure of 100 000 cadres is an arbitrary one. It is the result of an addition in which the same militants are counted twice (or even more often) because they have different functions at different levels. Nevertheless, as Kriegel puts it, "it does give an idea of the size".
68. OFFERLE, *Sociologie des groupes d'intérêt, op. cit.*, p. 97.
69. GAXIE, 'Economie des partis et rétributions du militantisme', *op. cit.*, p. 130.
70. ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism, op. cit.*, p. 111.
71. OFFERLE, *Les partis politiques, op. cit.*, p. 78.
72. ALMOND & COLEMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
73. Thus the study of Marxism-Leninism was always paralleled by the study of party history, the incarnation of Marxism-Leninism.
74. MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
76. Interview with Gérard Leneveu, 20.2.1992. Also see Chapter 6, "*Jusqu'au dernier souffle*".
77. BELLASSAI, *op. cit.*, p. 105. A document from an Italian party school states: "One cannot imagine that forty Communists who, despite being largely young and diverse not only in terms of social activity, backdrop and political activity, but also from the point of view of their character and work methods, are naturally able to find the harmony necessary to live, work and study together, without the intervention of a Law to set things right. This law is the criticism and self-criticism." (*Ibid.*, note 40.)
78. MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
79. THOREZ, M., *Fils du peuple*. (Editions sociales, Paris, 1949), p. 240; in HAZAREESINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
80. JOHNSON, R., *The French Communist Party versus the Students*. (Yale University, New Haven, 1972), p. 3.

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81. ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
 82. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
 83. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
 84. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.
 85. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
 86. JOHNSON, R., *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 87. WESSON, R.G., *Communism and Communist Systems*. (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Eaglewood Cliffs, N. Jersey 07632), p. 17.
 88. ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
 89. The CPGB used to send small groups of "promising students" to the Higher Party School in Moscow where they attended an 18-month course with visiting lectures including Leonid Brezhnev, Anastas Mikoyan, Yuri Gagarin and foreign communist leaders. Summer schools for British Communists were held in Eastern Bloc countries. (Interview with James RIORDAN in Portsmouth, 23.1.1991) The Finnish Communist Party (SKP) sent its own cadres who had graduated from the national party school, Sirola Opisto, to Moscow and also to the GDR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania. (Interview with Arvo AALTO, General Secretary of the SKP 1969-84, and the Party Chairman 1984-88, 17.12.1990 in Helsinki). The French Communist Party began sending cadres to Moscow in the 1920s (see Chapter 3) and continued, intermittently, until the 1970s (see Chapter 5).
 90. Communist Party of Great Britain, Educational Plan, September 1964 - September 1965. Source: The HQ of the CPGB, 6 Cynthia Street, London.
 91. ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
 92. MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
 93. ALMOND, *The Appeals of Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 6. Much of the description in this section is based Almond's analysis of the "ideal Communist", pp. 6-13.
 94. KRIEGEL, *The French Communists*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
 95. MEYER, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
 96. MONNEROT, J., *Sociology of Communism*. (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1953), p. 36, note 2.
 97. *Ibid.*
 98. *Ibid.*, p. 36, note 3.
 99. INKELES, *op. cit.*, p. 15, note 5.
 100. McCAULEY, M., *Stalin and Stalinism*. (Longman, 1983), p. 43. See also ALMOND, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30, for more examples of military metaphors and language cherished by Lenin and Stalin.
 101. MONNEROT, *op. cit.*, p. 37, note 3.
 102. *Ibid.*

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103. Ibid.
104. SERVIN, M., 'La conception léniniste de la montée des cadres et de l'expérience du Parti', *Cahiers du communisme*, avril, 1948, p. 410.
105. MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 13. See also ROSSI, A., *Psychologie du PCF*. (Paris, Editions Self, 1948), p. 337.
106. "*Communist leadership*", A 3-Lesson Syllabus. Published by the CPGB in 1948. (Underlining in the original.)
107. SERVIN, 'La conception ...', *op. cit.*, p. 408.
108. ALMOND, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
109. EINAUDI, M., DOMENACH, J-M. & GAROSCI, A., *Communism in Western Europe*. (Archon Books, Conneticut, reprinted 1971), p. 94.
110. McCAULEY, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
111. MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 17, note 10.
112. Ibid., p. 178, note 5.
113. SERVIN, M., 'Choisir, former, promouvoir hardiment les cadres', *Cahiers du communisme*, mai, 1949, p. 413.
114. "He who is unable to display initiative, who says 'I will do only what I am told', is not a Bolshevik," wrote Dimitrov (quoted in MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 20).
115. STALIN, J.V., *History of the CPSU(B)*., p.p. 362-63, quoted in MEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
116. THOREZ, M., *Une politique française*, in SERVIN, 'La conception ..', *op. cit.*, p. 416.
117. SERVIN, 'La conception ..', *op. cit.*, pp. 417-18.
118. Ibid., p. 419-20. Also see SERVIN, 'Choisir, former ..', *op. cit.*, p. 573.
119. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-33.
120. Ibid., p. 226.
121. The work was in fact a collective effort written by several people; see ROBRIEUX, P. *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste français, Tome I*, *op. cit.*, p. 481.
122. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
123. Ibid., pp. 223-24.
124. Ibid., p. 185. (Emphasis added)
125. Ibid.
126. Geroges Cogniot, Victor Joannes and Frédéric Dupuy were all teachers or directors of the PCF's central schools at various times.
127. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

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128. As a victim of communist repression, Thorez was on the run for two years before being caught and sent to prison for nearly a year from June 1929 to April 1930; see ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure*, Tome IV, *op. cit.*, p. 524.
129. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
130. Ibid., see pp. 237-72.
131. Ibid., p. 212.
132. Ibid., p. 213.

CHAPTER 3

THE ORIGINS: FROM CHAOS TO ORDER (1920-39)

This chapter will examine the origins and initial development of the political education system of the French Communist Party in the context of the Party's early life, i.e. from the split of the French Socialist Party (SFIO) at Tours in 1920, which resulted in the formation of the PCF, up to the beginning of the Second World War. This early life of the "party of a new type" can be divided into three periods. The first period (1920-24) was marked by a continuing socialist influence, internal and external conflict and ideological confusion; the second period (1924-34) was dominated by the Comintern-imposed bolshevisation programme, which brought about profound changes in the PCF (and all other CPs); the third period (1934-39) was characterised by the anti-fascist Popular Front strategy which made the PCF into a mass party and an important national force. The brief outlines of the above periods in the PCF's early history will also serve a more specific purpose. They will highlight the real need which existed for an efficient political education programme in the French Communist Party, and will demonstrate how the further development of the embryonic training system was shaped by the changes within the PCF during its "apprenticeship" period.

The origins and early development of the PCF's political education system

The French Communist Party was born at the Congress of Tours in December 1920, when the majority of the delegates of the French Socialist Party voted to join the Third Communist International (Comintern). As a consequence of this adherence to the Comintern, the new SFIC (*Section française de l'Internationale communiste* which became *Parti communiste français* in October 1921¹) assumed the challenging task of "grafting Bolshevik theory and practice onto the several powerful and often contradictory traditions of indigenous French socialism"² in order to become a "party of a new type" in the true Leninist sense. The PCF's first few years were thus a "period of apprenticeship in the application of Leninist-style strategy and tactics".³

To start with, the French Communist Party's policy-making organs remained in the hands of bourgeois intelligentsia (as was also the case in the Soviet party). Of the 32 members of the Executive Committee of the First Congress of the PCF, only four were workers and the rest were "intellectuals ... or those generally disposed in their favour".⁴ The Party lacked ideological unity, and knowledge even of basic Marxism was sketchy. The political views of many of the founding members were still far from Leninist: in Philippe Robrieux' words, as late as 1923-24, the PCF remained an "amalgam of French traditions: amongst its leaders Louis Sellier was social-democrat, Alfred Rosmer an anarcho-syndicalist, Marcel Cachin a guesdiste and Albert Treint a pacifist".⁵ Not surprisingly, then, in early 1923, more than two years after the Congress of Tours, Lenin told two prominent trade union leaders, Pierre Sémard and Gaston Monmousseau, in Moscow: "There is at present no communist party in France. Do you want to build one?"⁶

The PCF also had to sort out its relationship with the Comintern. Despite its affiliation to the international mother organisation, the early years of the French Communist Party saw a series of conflicts break out, and there were deep divisions among the French Communists in their attitudes to the Comintern.⁷ Initially, the Comintern itself restricted its own interventions, but judging that the progress of the PCF was very slow, it subsequently speeded up the "co-ordination process". The battle was to be protracted as the PCF took a long time to come to heel and to accept the Comintern's policy shifts and demands for increased working-class representation and influence. The centralisation of the PCF's organisational structures and subordination to the Comintern - the Party's "bolshevisation" - began in earnest in 1924 and lasted until 1934, when the transformation of the leadership structure was completed with Maurice Thorez finally becoming the party leader.

It is against this backdrop of initial confusion and internal and external conflict that we need to examine the origins and early development of the political education system in the French Communist Party. The early period of Communist political training in France has been extensively researched and written about by Danielle Tartakowsky, on

whose work much of the following information is based.⁸

For a few years after the foundation of the PCF it was the bourgeois-educated intellectuals who trained the party cadres, its journalists and deputies (although in fact, there had been no systematic “cadre training” in the SFIO: cadres were mainly recruited amongst the “traditional intellectuals”, and it was not even necessary to be a party member in order to be eligible for a training course as virtually anybody sufficiently interested in the matter could attend what amounted to no more than “*une suite de conférences plus ou moins érudites*”⁹). In the new party training was first taken up by the *école du propagandiste* headed by Charles Rappoport who had already run a Communist-Marxist school since 1919. The schools were Rappoport’s own invention and student recruitment was based on “voluntary participation” on the lines of the old *universités populaires*.¹⁰ The first propagandist school was set up by the Seine Federation in January 1921 and it was aimed at party activists, or as Rappoport put it, “future activists”, who were selected for training by the Paris region’s communist sections. The six-month course consisted of two weekly lessons, and the objectives seem to have been realised to some extent as 23 students of the 107 (21%) went on to occupy divers positions of responsibility in the party and 10 stood as candidates in various elections.¹¹ The syllabus included subjects such as history and theory, the Party, political economy, the Russian Revolution and Russia, labour movement abroad, the peasant question, war, and the international situation. Explicit and sometimes naive references were made to Marxism alone: thus, in a lecture concerning “*la femme du communisme primitif au communisme futur*”, a certain Madeleine Rauzé wrote with all sincerity: “*J’ai essayé de faire quelque chose aussi marxiste que possible.*”¹²

Tartakowsky observes that Rappoport’s propagandist school was in fact nothing more than an extension within the Communist Party of the old socialist schools, as no new elements had been added. This is easy to understand given the heterogeneous composition of the party at the time. Hence the Comintern considered Rappoport’s schools as a real threat to the homogenisation of the PCF and sought to minimise his efforts : “*Le parti tâche naturellement par des écoles marxistes et ses écoles propagandistes de former des cadres. Cependant, il ne faut pas se faire trop d’illusions*

sur la portée de ces écoles."¹³ With the centralisation of the PCF's internal structure through the process of bolshevisation now imminent, the issue of creating a political training programme which would satisfy the Comintern's demands had to be tackled.

"Bolshevisation" and party schools

The slogan "bolshevisation of the communist parties" was adopted by the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924. It was in fact an old issue that the 21 Conditions should have dealt with: the transformation, in Leninist terms, of old western social-democratic parties, with their democratic and parliamentary traditions, into tight, disciplined "instruments of revolution" based on the model of the Russian communist party.¹⁴ The practical meaning of bolshevisation was expounded in the theses on tactics adopted by the Comintern: "The basic features of a genuine bolshevik party are: first, the party must be a real mass party; second, it must be capable of manoeuvre and its tactics should not be sectarian or dogmatic; third, it must be revolutionary, Marxist in nature; fourth, it must be a centralised party, permitting no fractions, tendencies or groups - *it must be fused in one mould*; fifth, it must carry out systematic and persistent propaganda and organisation in bourgeois armies."¹⁵ As the bolshevisation of the French Communist Party was begun and the centralisation of its internal structure and its subordination to Moscow commenced, these theses were now invoked. The PCF's bolshevisation process was to be completed by the end of 1924, but this turned out to be an optimistic timetable as the setting up of a leadership nucleus and party apparatus was not accomplished until 1930. The final stages were completed in 1934, when Maurice Thorez finally consolidated his power as the undisputed leader of the French Communist Party.

The initial process of adaptation concerned the party organisation: the PCF was to be organised on a basis of factory cells (rather than those based on *communes*) to preserve its working-class image. The second stage was the removal of the autonomy enjoyed by the lower bodies in relation to the higher ones. It was replaced by the organisational principle of democratic centralism, which (as we have seen in Chapter 2 above, in

practice) meant the decisions of the higher organs were binding on the lower echelons. The development of democratic centralism took place simultaneously with the Comintern-imposed proletarianisation of the party. There was an obvious causal relationship between the two events: democratic centralism was the ideal tool for enabling the working-class leadership to remain in control, as it allowed the co-opting of the leaders rather than their free selection.¹⁶

The most significant and lasting effects of bolshevisation were thus the subordination of the PCF to the Komintern and the proletarianisation of the party leadership. After Lenin's death, Stalin had replaced the traditional intellectuals by new-style party-trained recruits from the "factories, the mines and the shock brigades"¹⁷ to help form his power base within the party apparatus. Parallel power struggles and changes took place in the French Communist Party, and they culminated in the development of a rigidly Stalinised party in the 1930s. Thus the new generation of French communist leaders promoted in the 1920s consisted mainly of workers: Jacques Duclos had trained as a pastry cook; Pierre Sémard was a railwayman and became the general secretary of the party in 1926; Henri Barbé, a mechanic, reached the Central Committee via the *Jeunesse Communiste*; and Albert Vassart, a metalworker, joined the Central Committee through the CGTU Metalworkers' Federation. Most important of all, Maurice Thorez, from a mining background, accomplished a meteoric rise becoming the party secretary in 1930 and its leader four years later. By 1929, 70 per cent of the Central Committee was of working-class origin.¹⁸ The process had thus taken ten years, but the transformation was impressive. In Kriegel's words, "The consequences of this accomplishment were considerable: the communist party acquired a nucleus that was solid, stable and impervious to repression. Around it was a protective, more or less impenetrable wall of militants, members and sympathisers. The change, in effect, amounted to nothing less than *the replacement of amateurs by professionals*."¹⁹

As Tiersky points out, with hindsight it is easy to see why it was urgent that the mixed bag of heritage and personalities, which was the early form of the French Communist Party, should be homogenised, and that the existing conflicts concerning organisation, methods and aims should be surmounted. For the Comintern, theory was to be one of

the most important unifying elements of communist parties and their memberships, and bolshevisation was the key to quelling the internal struggles:

“Bolshevisation ... means the final ideological victory of Marxism-Leninism ... over the ‘Marxism’ of the Second International and the syndicalist remains. [...] Only if the communist parties acquire *theoretical understanding of revolutionary practice* can they become leaders of masses, conscious of their aims. [...] It is therefore the primary task of the Communist International to make Marxism-Leninism *the common property of all members* ... For this purpose, *cadres must be created who are in full possession of these theoretical weapons* and who can in turn equip the broadest circles of the party membership with them...”²⁰

With this in mind, the Comintern set up a central school of agitation and propaganda in Moscow. The school would be in overall charge of communist political education, and each national communist party was also obliged to create a network of schools at all levels consisting of both a central party school and elementary party courses (evening classes, lecture series, one-day Sunday schools, etc.²¹) in order to tackle the question of political training more systematically than in the past.

In the same vein, the Hungarian Communist Bela Kun wrote in his report to the first conference of the Comintern Executive’s Agitation and Propaganda Services: “I think that now is the time to put on the agenda in all communist parties the Marxist-Leninist education of all members and cadres so that Leninism becomes the common property of all communist party members.”²² Thus it was no longer Marxism but Marxism-Leninism (as codified by Stalin in his work “*Principles of Leninism*”) that was to standardise communist party ideology. This standardisation in the French Communist Party was carried out by Leninist schools (as opposed to Rappoport’s old Marxist schools, “tainted by social-democratic leaven”).²³ In France the communist education programme was directed by the German Communist Party member Alfred Kurella, who had been appointed by the Comintern.²⁴ The new Leninist schools were to marry theory and practice and reject all forms of cultural education (“*valeur bourgeoise*”):

“L’ouvrier veut posséder une éducation générale; bientôt, il oublie sa classe; car dans la société capitaliste, l’ouvrier ne peut pénétrer dans le domaine des sciences bourgeoises qu’à condition d’abandonner la lutte et

de rejoindre le rang de l'ennemi. [...] Qui veut acquérir la science prolétarienne, doit se jeter dans la bataille,"

wrote Kurella emphatically, undoubtedly as a natural reaction against the eclecticism practised by the social-democratic schools.²⁵

Exactly at the start of the bolshevisation programme, the Comintern also initiated the establishment of the first permanent central school in Bobigny in September 1924 with two full-time teachers, Alfred Kurella and Paul Marion. From time to time, the Comintern also sent other teachers, and party leaders also came to lecture on various topics.²⁶ Leninism imposed its mark on the teaching programme and most *cours* were devoted to subjects that had not been featured in the social-democratic training programmes. No syllabi of the first central school in Bobigny have been found, but Tartakowsky has been able to reconstruct some of the topics taught from the federal school programmes. These were the international situation; colonial questions; the high cost of living; *bloc des gauches et fascisme*; bolshevisation of the party; the conquest of masses; Marx and Engels; the Second International; the Imperialist war; history of the Bolshevik Party; the Third International; the Russian Revolution; Soviet Russia; *Bloc ouvrier et paysan (BOP)*; trade union unity.²⁷ Sixty students took part in the first central school course in Bobigny: 53 men and 7 women. There were 47 workers and 7 *employés* which indicates that the instructions concerning the students' social origins seem to have been heeded.²⁸

In general terms, the early central schools achieved mixed results. Their ambitious programmes proved too extensive for the type of student they were aimed at and the intensive pace meant that most subjects could only be touched upon in a very cursory manner, which further confused the students and made it difficult for them to digest the courses taught.²⁹ One of the first students, Albert Vassart, wrote later that out of the 60 students on the first course, 30 left the Party less than five years later, and a further eight in the 1930s. When the war broke out, only about ten former Bobigny students were still party members (including Jacques Duclos and Fernand Grenier) despite the fact that the school had become so well known that instead of speaking about the French Communist Party's bolshevisation many referred to its "*bobignisation*".³⁰ On the

positive side, however, the immediate results were not inconsiderable. The schools had contributed to the setting up and running of factory cells as prescribed in the bolshevisation programme; trained cadres were dispatched to regions where politically educated leadership was lacking. Many became instructors in their turn and taught in regional and local schools up and down the country. Despite the “wastage” mentioned above, at least twelve students entered the Party’s Central Committee (two in 1925, eight in 1926, one in 1929 and one, Fernand Grenier, in 1945).³¹ At this stage, however, most of the Communist Party’s new generation of leaders (Thorez, etc.) had not attended any party schools; out of necessity, their learning took place in the field.

Changing strategies of the PCF and their effect on the political education system

The new Politbureau elected at the Congress of Lille in June 1926 differed greatly from that of the pre-bolshevisation period (only two members, Cachin and Sellier, remained). New leaders had emerged from the CGTU (*Confédération générale du travail unitaire*) and *Jeunesse communiste*, and Maurice Thorez had risen to the Politbureau through the Party’s provincial organisation. The Lille Congress also marked the end of the hard leftist orientation, the proponents of which (Albert Treint and Suzanne Girault) were excluded from the Politbureau. The natural reaction resulting from the change of tack was the Party’s attempt to approach other parties of the left; this policy was subsequently labelled “right-wing” and “opportunistic” when the “class-against-class” tactic³² was imposed on the French Communists by the Comintern in April 1927 as a part of the overall Comintern strategy. For the Comintern as a whole, this period was one of narrow sectarianism; for most of its sections, including the French Communist Party, it meant growing political isolation and increasing subordination to the international Bolshevik community centred around the Soviet Communist Party.³³

Electorally, the new tactic had disastrous consequences for the PCF. The anti-alliance electoral strategy of the French Communists clashed with the change in the electoral law (which favoured alliances) and the Party’s parliamentary representation went down from 26 seats to 14 in 1928. In addition, the party activists found the new strategy

incomprehensible, and internal dissension spread when the Comintern accelerated its swing to the left after Stalin had broken with Bukharin in the spring of 1928. A new witch-hunt against right-wing tendencies commenced in the Comintern sections after the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in July-September 1928 when the organisation became almost entirely an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. The premise on which it had been founded - that the survival of the Russian Revolution depended on the revolution in the rest of Europe - had been completely and conveniently reversed. Profound changes were therefore required in the French Communist Party to comply with the new orders.

The party leadership underwent a complete transformation at the 1929 Congress at Saint-Denis, and Thorez's promotion corresponded to the first *rééquilibrage* of the currents present in the French Communist Party. This upheaval was followed by yet another turn in Comintern strategy: there was now a gradual return to political reality in the course of which the leadership of Barbé and Celor³⁴ was eliminated in 1931 and Thorez was enthroned as the official party leader (although not yet as general secretary). Thorez was, however, flanked by the Comintern's "professional international revolutionaries" including Eugen Fried, Anna Pauker, Ernő Gerö and Georges Kagan.³⁵ Each member of the Comintern team was personally responsible for a given section of the PCF's Central Committee (organisation, trade unions, education, etc.), and in fact, Fried's team took over the real leadership of the Party during the winter 1931-32 after the elimination of the Barbé-Celor faction. In Mortimer's words, the PCF had thus been finally "sovietised" and "taken completely in hand by the Stalinist machine, and politically domesticated to an extent that probably no other party ever was".³⁶ As to Eugen Fried and his Comintern colleagues, it was their incomparably higher cultural level and vast political experience which was to impose far-reaching changes on the PCF's attitude towards party education and intellectuals.

During the "class-against-class" period the PCF's membership dropped sharply from an estimated 52 000 in 1925 to around 30 000 in 1930 and to 28 000 in 1933 (some estimates are as low as 18 000).³⁷ In addition, the Party was forced to live in semi-illegality because of the French government's repressive action against Communists.³⁸

The lack of clear and co-ordinated leadership in the Party had an obvious effect on party activities: this was particularly true in the case of the party education, which was relegated to the background with just piecemeal measures taken here and there.

After the promising start at Bobigny, the central school programmes at national level now came to an abrupt end with the departure to Moscow of Alfred Kurella in 1927. Even before Kurella's departure, Bobigny's other permanent teacher, Paul Marion, had been selected to study at the first International Lenin School which had opened in Moscow in 1926 (see below).³⁹ All education work was transferred to the regions themselves; they organised regional schools based on course material prepared centrally and approved by the Comintern.⁴⁰ In order to standardise the course structures and content, two Comintern instructors were made responsible specifically for co-ordinating the training in the regional schools. They were Victor Fay, a member of the Polish Communist Party,⁴¹ and Vital Gayman, the secretary-general of *L'Humanité*. A good illustration of the functioning of these schools is provided by Danielle Tartakowsky and the account that follows is largely drawn from her research.⁴²

The first series of schools took place between July 1929 and March 1930. They differed from the central schools of the earlier period in many respects. Although under central control, they were organised by the regions and student selection was therefore based on "regional characteristics" ("*un modèle réduit de la région*", as Tartakowsky puts it). Nor was there any longer a marked preference for working-class cadres. The aim was now less to "teach the elementary notions of Communism, doctrine and its principles", but rather to "complete, co-ordinate and make more systematic both the theoretical and political knowledge that the cadres had acquired in the course of their activism in the Party" (p. 232). Victor Fay taught history and theory, but the regional party leaderships were required to provide instruction in political and practical subjects as they were more familiar with the specific activities and problems of their region. Political education was often considered an unnecessary additional task by the regional party leaders, and Fay lamented their indifferent attitudes: "[For them] it was just extra work ... There were so few people and so much work. All that they saw was that some of their cadres were going to disappear for a fortnight and after that, maybe for even longer." (p. 238) In

these circumstances it was not surprising to see a considerable drop in course standards and relaxation of the selection criteria.⁴³

Some socio-professional details are known about the regional school students in the Paris region, Marseilles, Centre-East, Lyons, the Alps region and the Languedoc. According to filed reports, the average age of the students was 27 years and they were predominantly working-class (more so than the average membership of the Party at the time). Almost half were steel or building workers. Most were skilled workers (*ouvriers qualifiés*) and most worked in small companies. 39.4 per cent had joined the PCF between 1925 and 1927, 46 per cent between 1928 and 1930. Only 14.8 per cent had been party members before 1923 (6.7 per cent had joined in or before 1920). Tartakowsky points out that most of those who had joined before 1924 had been trade union members before becoming communist party members; the conclusion is therefore that they were probably led to join the PCF through their trade union activities.⁴⁴ As to their political or trade union responsibilities, the students generally occupied higher positions than those in the previous party schools. The students' progress was carefully monitored and reports were compiled on their leaving.⁴⁵

The Central Committee meeting in July 1930 also brought about a change of direction in the training of the party cadres. "We need," declared Thorez, "new resources, new cadres but we must also make efforts to re-educate the old cadres. It is inconceivable that we should have to find a new cadre for every new '*tournant*' of the Party." Consequently, between 1930 and 1939 - gradually and always depending on international and national circumstances - all party activity was critically reassessed, and activists underwent a reeducation programme whose aim was to reverse the PCF's tendency towards a *repli puriste*.⁴⁶ This also meant the end of the regional school experiment, as the emphasis was now placed on the further education of already trained cadres. Much of this subsequent systematic political education took place in the International Lenin School⁴⁷ in Moscow, and for this reason it is appropriate to take a look at this establishment, of which - despite its reputation - little was known.

The International Lenin School

Until the mid-1930s, all formal higher level political training of French communist leaders took place at the International Lenin School in Moscow. The first plans for the establishment of the ILS were drawn up as early as May 1923 by the French Communist Boris Souvarine. In 1925, Bela Kun further elaborated the principles of the new international communist school: "It will not be a simple pedagogic establishment - it will group together well 'developed' militants, leaders with a certain amount of experience and theoretical knowledge, all under the direction of competent comrades."⁴⁸ The school was officially opened in 1926, three years after the initial decision to do so by which time the situation in the Soviet Union had completely changed with the death of Lenin and the rise of Stalin. This had a considerable impact on the further development of the ILS, which became the tool of the Soviet Party and Stalin. Henri Barbé, member of the Comintern's Executive Committee, Secretariat and Presidium in 1928, writes in his memoirs: "[This school] was completely in the hands of the Communist Party of the USSR. The director was a Russian woman, Comrade Kirsanova ... All the administration was taken care of by the Russians. Almost all teachers were Russian or naturalised foreigners and members of the Soviet Party."⁴⁹ The Comintern financed the ILS and considered the students' training period an investment for the future revolution.

There are no exact figures for the numbers of students who passed through the ILS. The school started off rather modestly with a few dozen students, but soon expanded to become an international institution of higher party education with almost a thousand students being trained every year. However, the school did not exist "officially" and it operated in great secrecy. Arvo Tuominen, the Finnish Communist Party's general secretary 1935-39, confirms in his memoirs that no records were ever published and adds that it was "most inadvisable to make enquiries relating to student numbers".⁵⁰

Subjects studied at the ILS followed the general lines of the curricula of all Comintern schools. In the first year, there were five main subjects: political economy, history of the labour movement, history of the Soviet Party, its structures and the Russian

language. Three subjects out of five thus treated the Russian aspect only, and this Russification increased over the years. Theoretical studies of Marxism-Leninism were not the only reason for the students to be sent to Moscow: they also went there to be tested and selected in view of their subsequent party careers. "Testing" meant confronting them with the realities of Soviet life and noting down their reactions to measure the extent of their allegiance to the cause, the Kremlin and the Comintern. "Selection" enabled the Comintern to get rid of the "founder generation" of Communists and replace them with younger Comintern apparatchiks who were judged to be more reliable.⁵¹ There were also courses dealing with the practical problems of political fieldwork. Students were trained in organisational methods (organising and conducting meetings), infiltration techniques and all aspects of clandestine work (secret recruitment, insurrectionary techniques, street fighting, secret communication, conspiracy and demonstration techniques).⁵²

Stalin's purges in the mid-1930s also affected the ILS as it became closely involved with the disputes among the Soviet leadership. From 1936 onwards, the school's activities were considerably curtailed because of the Spanish Civil War. Its operations were transferred from the new purpose-built training complex in Moscow's Lenin Hills to the other side of the city.⁵³ Student numbers dwindled rapidly, and during the Second World War the ILS was closed down.

Many former ILS students later became leaders of their respective national parties. Waldeck Rochet, Gus Hall, the general secretary of the CPUSA, Josip Broz Tito, Wladyslaw Gomulka and the Finnish communist party leader Ville Pessi all attended the International Lenin School.⁵⁴ However, apart from Waldeck Rochet, very little is known about the careers of the French ILS students in the PCF. Henri Barbé noted in his memoirs *Souvenirs de militant et dirigeant communiste* that "five or six selected groups of students sent to Moscow between 1927 and 1933 numbered about 100 people in all. Of these students, only ten at the most are currently [Barbé wrote in the 1950s] members of the Party. Of the 24 students who were at the ILS at the same time as Waldeck Rochet [1930-31], only five are presently party members. The other 19 left years ago."⁵⁵ Barbé hazards no guesses as to their reasons of leaving, but his remarks

concerning the students' practical "learning experience" may well contain some key factors. As described above, the ILS students were also provided with "practical training" which included excursions within the USSR to factories and farms. This method involved student "assessment" and therefore also carried certain risks as to their loyalty to the cause. An incident recorded by Barbé illustrates the point. After much theoretical work on economic problems in capitalist societies and economic progress in a planned economy (the USSR), the French students were sent to a Soviet factory as a part of their practical coursework. For the first time, they came into contact with the "concrete management" of a "socialist" factory and also the "authentic social life" of Russian workers and their families. The contradiction between theory and practice could not have been greater and upon their return to the school, a violent argument broke out within the French group - no longer about the difference between the capitalist and Soviet systems, but this time about the disparity between the theoretical courses concerning socialist production in the USSR and the actual reality which the students had observed. Only one student stood firm in defence of his pro-Soviet ground, opposing the others: it was Waldeck Rochet, who denied the facts just witnessed.⁵⁶ The last French student contingent returned to France in March 1937 after 18 months of study at the ILS.⁵⁷ By this time the Popular Front strategy of the PCF was in full swing in France.

The Popular Front: more education for more members

The course of events before, during and after the Popular Front is well known and documented. However, a sketch of its essential features will establish a background for the evolution of the PCF's political education system just before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Despite the problems caused by the oscillating tactics imposed by the Comintern the Popular Front tactic in 1936 marked a coincidence of Soviet and French communist interests. It succeeded within the PCF because Soviet foreign policy initiatives matched the interests of potential communist party allies (this was, of course, to be an essential

condition of subsequent communist “reintegrations” into French politics). The initiative for the shift in the Comintern line (according to Soviet historians) came from G. Dimitrov in April 1934 and the PCF officially adopted the new policy at its Ivry Conference in June 1934. By the autumn of 1934, Thorez had begun to use the term “*Front populaire*”,⁵⁸ and in July 1935, the 7th Comintern Congress approved the new policy, thus enabling the PCF to adopt the strategy officially.⁵⁹

The new strategy paid off very quickly as the legislative elections held in April 1936 produced a left majority and the PCF spectacularly increased its number of seats in the National Assembly from 12 in 1932 (8% of the vote) to 72 (15% of the vote). The election victory naturally brought up the question of Communist participation in the Popular Front government. After much soul searching, the Communists declined to participate in the Blum government of June 1936 and opted for “loyal support without participation” managing thus to situate themselves at the same time “within” and “without” the established power structure.⁶⁰

Yet, despite the PCF’s participation in coalition politics, there was no corresponding moderation in terms of the Party’s internal organisation or its ties to the Soviet Union.

On the contrary, it adopted the mode of functioning of the Soviet party and tended towards complete monolithism. This became more than evident at the PCF’s 8th Congress at Villeurbanne in January 1936: Robrieux observes that the delegates had been carefully selected by the *section des cadres* and were “elected” unanimously by their federations (which was easy, as there was “*une seule liste, un seul candidat pour poste vacant*”).⁶¹ Unanimity was, however, easier to apply at the top than at the base of the Party, and in order to impose the new rigid rule at all echelons, the PCF had to possess the right kind of cadres and a system of ideological conditioning. Important changes therefore took place in the composition of the Central Committee and Politbureau between 1932 and 1936 as the apparatus had to be renewed and also trimmed down in order to comprise trustworthy and ideologically sound cadres who would implement the new party line without any questions. According to Pudal, this was the time when *le groupe dirigeant fondamental* was formed and it subsequently remained solid for decades to come: “[M. Thorez] procède à l’éloge du groupe

dirigeant dont il peut exhiber, pour la première fois dans l'histoire du PCF, la cohérence et la légitimité interne."⁶² Two years later, at the Congress of Arles in 1937, *"la cohésion du groupe dirigeant est à ce point raffermie que Maurice Thorez peut offrir aux délégués assemblés l'image d'un comité central resté soudé"*.⁶³ An illustration of this is Waldeck Rochet, who was a Central Committee member in 1934 and became the party leader in 1964 after 34 years of Thorez at the helm. From now on, the leadership therefore provided an important source of much needed stability which however, ultimately, became a force of stagnation.

Now, a reliable but narrow top echelon no longer sufficed for a party whose membership was increasing at an incredible speed. The Popular Front had made the PCF into a mass party: membership rose to 87 000 in 1935; at the end of 1936 there were 235 000 members, and a year later the Party had 302 000 members. The peak was reached in 1938 with 319 000 members.⁶⁴ There was an urgent need to find - or to create - militants who could and would act in accordance with the new party strategy. The party education system therefore took on a more important role than ever before.

The PCF's Seventh Congress in 1932 had voted through a special resolution concerning the Party's theoretical work in order to encourage the regions to pay more sustained attention to educational work within political activity as a whole. The resolution had set out an extremely ambitious training programme which, in 1935, still remained largely unfulfilled. *"Trois ans après le 7e Congrès, le retard de l'ensemble du Parti sur le front théorique persiste,"* wrote Etienne Fajon in May 1935.⁶⁵ Fajon had every reason to criticise this lack of effort; he had been appointed in 1935 to take charge of the PCF's training system, which he had found in a chaotic state. Fajon's appointment was a major step forward for him in the party hierarchy since with the Party's membership explosion during the Popular Front, political education had now become a key issue.⁶⁶

Thorez's brief to the new education chief was short and simple: he was to avoid, at all costs, the sclerotic *schémas* of previous training programmes and the dangers of dogmatism. Basing his proposals on Stalin's writings (in his *"Fundamentals of Leninism"*, Stalin said that "theory is the synthesis of experience of the labour

movement of all countries”), Fajon drew up a new regional training plan comprising three main elements: *causerie mensuelle* (a series of monthly educational talks, usually on a topical subject), a reading programme of party literature and publications, and a new permanent elementary school network.

The cornerstone of Fajon’s training plan was the establishment of the elementary school network. In preparation for the courses, the communist leadership drew up a simple brochure, “*Que veulent les communistes*”. This consisted of four lessons: Capitalism, Socialism, The Communist Party, and Communist Policy.⁶⁷ Students were to be recruited among new party members and those who had not previously followed a party training course. The course selectors were also to ensure that each school recruited a good number of women and young people. Teachers were to be found among the best-trained militants with considerable practical experience and good organisational ability. The four weekly sessions were to be followed by an *autocritique* of the school and a follow-up of the students’ subsequent activities, so that the Party could make the best possible use of their aptitudes and talents.⁶⁸

Fajon also set up the PCF’s first *section d’éducation*, and contrary to previous practice, he chose to appoint “*de jeunes universitaires communistes de premier rang*”,⁶⁹ in other words, intellectuals who had been shunned by the party instructors in the past. Maurice Thorez himself played an important role in the reintroduction of the intellectuals into the party education system. Bernard Pudal explains this by the fact that the Party leadership needed the intellectuals to create a communist culture for “Thorezian cadres” in order to legitimise the dominant position of the latter. Pudal also points out that “reintegrating” the party intellectuals would simply not have been possible before: “organic” intellectuals had to first conquer the leadership positions; second, they had to acquire a sufficient amount of theoretical education; and last, they had to elaborate the ideology of their own pre-eminence.⁷⁰ Another decisive factor in the new direction was the influence exercised by the Comintern team of intellectual “mindes”.⁷¹ Fajon’s main collaborators were Georges Politzer and Jacques Solomon. Politzer (“*le type même du philosophe militant, sincère et et totalement engagé dans le communisme stalinien*”⁷²) was a philosopher and political economist who had joined the PCF in 1929, and

Solomon was a physicist and researcher who lectured at the *Collège de France*. Both were devoted party activists, Politzer directing the *centre de documentation* and Solomon being a member of the *rayon* secretariat of the 5th *arrondissement* in Paris.

Other intellectuals drafted in to help with the setting up of the new education section included the historian Jean Bruhat and Hubert Roffe, who became deputy for Lot-et-Garonne in 1936 and was to direct the first 6-month central school in 1937.

The first tangible success of the education section was the elementary school organised in April 1935 at Gennevilliers in Paris. Fajon and Politzer both taught there every Thursday night, and Fajon proudly noted that some of his very first students subsequently did well in the Party: three became officers in the F.F.I. (*Forces françaises de l'intérieur*) and two others were elected deputies and mayors in their own towns. Pleased with his efforts, Fajon felt justified in declaring: "*Le train était mis sur les rails.*"⁷³

Towards the "total school experience"

To start with, the Party-produced *Guide du professeur des écoles élémentaires*⁷⁴ offered detailed instructions as to the practicalities of running an elementary school. Each school would begin with an introductory session during which the teacher would deliver a 30-minute *exposé* about the importance of political education, draw up a list of students and arrange the time and place for the next meeting. Students would buy their study brochures and also pay for the brochures for those who were unemployed. Meetings were generally held once a week, with lessons lasting two-and-half hours. The lessons were divided into three parts: *le cours* lasting 45-50 minutes, *la répétition* of 45 minutes and *les travaux pratiques*. The *cours* had to be "concrete and simple, with clear examples", avoiding figures, phrases, scientific terms and long quotations. Students were encouraged to take notes in an exercise book, leaving a wide margin for corrections and explanations. Questions would be allowed after the lesson if there had been problems with comprehension. *Répétition* (or recapitulation) consisted of a virtual reconstruction of the lesson in question-and-answer form to establish how well the

students had digested the information imparted by the teacher. *Travaux pratiques* included preparing a tract or a poster which would be checked and corrected the following week. The best and worst examples were analysed and students were expected to “defend” their work. At the close of every elementary school there was an *autocritique* which would focus on the school experience as a whole: the organisation of the school, the teacher’s performance and the study programme would be evaluated by the students whilst the teacher would assess the work of every student. The second part of the *conclusion de l’école* was the *utilisation des élèves* focusing on the optimum deployment of the students, depending on their aptitudes and ability.

As for study materials, each student was given a reading list to cover the content of the lessons. *Ecole élémentaire du Rayon du 13e arrondissement de la Région Paris-Ville* distributed the following reading list to its students in 1935:⁷⁵ *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Programme of the Communist International*, *Lenin’s Karl Marx and his Doctrine* and *State and Revolution*, *Stalin’s Theoretical and Practical Leninism* and *Two Worlds, Vive la Commune* (Album de L’Huma), and the *Theses of the XIII Plenum of the Comintern*. These were to be read and revised continuously whilst “avoiding mechanical learning which would be of no use to the militant in a given situation when he would have to manage on his own, following the party line”. In 1935 in particular, the following statement seemed particularly apt: “*Les événements marchent si vite, que celui qui ne se tient pas au courant reste sur place; cela veut dire qu’il recule par rapport au mouvement. Il faut donc se tenir au courant de la ligne actuelle du Parti.*” Following the elementary schools, the first regional schools under Fajon’s direction were organised in the autumn and winter of 1935. They were either two-week *internats* or evening schools. Additional lecture topics and more detail distinguished the teaching programmes of these regional schools from those of the elementary schools. The courses consisted of around 15 *cours* (political economy, study of capitalism and imperialism, the State, bourgeois State and the socialist State, the fascist State and the democratic State, the Party, its role, policies, history, organisation, etc.) which Fajon himself taught in many regional schools together with a “trainee” teacher learning the ropes.⁷⁶ The regional schools were judged a success and opened up new horizons for many cadres in their quest for political education and self-improvement. André

Parinaud, who was to teach within the party education system in the postwar years, confided to Etienne Fajon after attending a regional school in Paris in 1935: "*Ma route s'est trouvée changée. Du combat d'instinct au combat certain.*"⁷⁷ This was the sentiment of many students: they had been given the tools to carry out their chosen task - and they had officially entered the area of moral commitment.

Paul Bouthonnier was the organiser of a 12-day regional school in the Lyons region and his report⁷⁸ gives a very accurate picture of the functioning of the regional schools at that time. The school took place in June 1936 in Villeurbanne in "extremely comfortable surroundings" (considered essential for a "successful learning experience"). The teaching programme included lessons on the basic issues of Marxism-Leninism as mentioned above, and on practical tasks such as designing a poster or writing a tract or an article. Students worked individually and in groups (*travail collectif*). They were assessed during and after the school period to ensure that the Party could make the best possible use of their specific talents and personal qualities. There was one notable new dimension (albeit very modest to start with), namely *culture générale*: two mornings were devoted to visiting museums (in this case, the Guinnet Museum and the Museum of Decorative Arts). This new aspect, which was in line with the reintegration of the intellectuals into the education system, was to be a permanent feature of all postwar regional and central school programmes. Bouthonnier also kept detailed records of the social composition of his body of students (which he considered "excellent"): out of 32 students, 21 were factory or other workers; seven were *employés*, two were artisans and three small shopkeepers. Most students were young: 19 were under 30 years of age, nine were between 30 and 35, six between 35 and 40 and one was 41. Only three were women. The school ended - as usual - with a *repas fraternel*, and the education experience as a whole was considered *fructueuse*, as the school was expected to "considerably strengthen the quality and numbers of the cadres in the region".

With the elementary and regional school networks becoming established and the activities of the International Lenin School being curtailed, the next logical step was to prepare a permanent training programme at central level. No permanent central schools had functioned properly since Bobigny, and in 1936 Fajon received the green light from

the leadership to prepare an experimental six-month central school programme. The school was organised at Bezons, on the outskirts of Paris, in an unoccupied building which was ready for demolition and on loan to the Education section by the mayor of the town, Louis Péronnet.⁷⁹ At central level, student recruitment was naturally founded on much stricter criteria, and the party leadership would examine in minute detail each student's credentials. As noted in Chapter 2, potential students at this level already occupied important positions in the party or its mass organisations; this demonstrated that they were devoted and loyal to the Party, had a sufficiently disciplined attitude as well as a capacity for initiative and close links with the masses. Once selected, the students were relieved of all other party duties so that they could concentrate fully on their studies.⁸⁰ The teaching programme drew its inspiration from Lenin's precept, "our theory is not a dogma but a guide for action", and also from the directives issued by "notre grand Dimitrov" who did not want the schools to train "*des exégètes, des raisonneurs et des maîtres de la citation - non! Ce sont des combattants pratiques, d'avant-garde pour la cause de la classe ouvrière qui doivent sortir de leurs murs.*"⁸¹

As to the course content, the Paris region's one-month central schools (seven were planned between October 1936 and January 1937) proposed to offer the following study programme: political economy (8 lessons); problems related to the State (3 lessons); history of the French nation (4 lessons); materialism (3 lessons); the Party and its organisational problems (8 lessons); party policy (9 lessons); and lectures on topical subjects (4 lessons). The main principle of the programme was to apply theory to real-life problems and everyday preoccupations to produce *combattants pratiques* who would solve the PCF's desperate cadre shortage. With more time available, the teaching of *culture générale* was increased in the central school programmes, with lectures on literature and visits to various museums and art galleries. Teaching methods were based on "concrete examples" and lessons normally lasted an hour and were followed by *questions de contrôle* to assess on-the-spot comprehension. Students worked in small groups, revising lessons from their notes with better students expected to show solidarity by helping the weaker ones. Working in groups was intended to teach the importance of *travail collectif*, which was essential in party organisations and committees. The practical work carried out in the central schools was an extended and more involved

version of the regional school tasks, designed to prepare the student for real-life militant activity in the field. Daily activities were minutely programmed and 12-13 hour days were the rule. The director of the school, André Caresmel, gives an example of a typical timetable which gives an indication of the intense pressure that the students were working under in order to adhere to their rigorous schedule of classes:

9.00-10.00	A plenary discussion
10.00-10.15	Break
10.15-11.15	Lesson
11.15-11.30	Break
11.30-12.00	Reading of newspapers
12.00-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.00	Lesson
15.05-16.00	Practical work
16.05-17.00	Personal reading
17.05-18.00	Meeting of working groups
18.00-20.30	Dinner
20.30-22.00	Personal reading

Without exaggerating, Caresmel drily remarked: "*Comme on peut en juger, la tâche qui attend nos élèves n'est pas mince.*"⁸²

Up to this time all PCF higher party training had taken place at the International Lenin School in Moscow. However, as that establishment was now reducing its teaching programmes and its increasing Russification was, in the words of Fajon, "considered inappropriate for the needs of the French Party",⁸³ the PCF decided that it was time to set up a permanent higher party school in France. Also according to Fajon, this was because communist parties were now "maturing" and a centralised organisation such as the Comintern was becoming an "*obstacle après avoir été une aide*"⁸⁴ which was a shift worth noting. The first permanent school was set up at Arcueil where the PCF bought a disused workshop with an adjoining building, but as there was no room for overnight accommodation, the students had to sleep in "*les hôtels les plus modestes des environs, à deux, et parfois trois, par chambre*". Nevertheless, the students' *soif d'apprendre* was

so great that the surroundings and material difficulties had no impact on the business of learning.⁸⁵

The organising of the permanent six-month school was such an enormous undertaking that the party educators felt the need to approach the Comintern, after all, for some practical and material help. This was readily forthcoming in the person of Fritz Glaubhauf, a Comintern special envoy and member of the Austrian CP. He arrived under the name of "Albert" but was soon nicknamed *la Lumière* by his French colleagues because of his dazzling intellectual qualities.⁸⁶ The director of the new central school was Hubert Roffe, who also lectured at the *Université nouvelle* and had been elected as a parliamentary deputy in 1936. The first six-month school was held from February to August in 1937 and the courses were mainly entrusted to party intellectuals: philosophy was taught by Politzer, political economy by Solomon, history of the French labour movement by Jean Bruhat and Paul Bouthonnier. Fajon himself still lectured on general political questions, in particular the Popular Front, whereas other topical subjects were taught by members of the relevant sections of the Central Committee (thus, Waldeck Rochet, for example, from the *section agraire* lectured on agriculture and Jacques Duclos from the propaganda section dealt with his specialist subject).⁸⁷

At this level also *culture générale* was the important new addition to the study programme. According to Glaubhauf,⁸⁸ Politzer in particular attached a great deal of importance to the need to compensate for the lack of education of the working-class students in this domain. It was particularly important for these students to learn to express themselves in writing and speech. For this, the PCF used the extensive talents of the plethora of communist intellectuals (members or sympathisers): Jean-Richard Bloch and René Maublanc lectured on literature; Joseph Billet, deputy curator of the Louvre, organised guided visits; Paul Langevin, professor of Collège de France and member of the Académie de Sciences, taught natural sciences. As already mentioned above, this was a complete break with the previous practice whereby intellectuals had been deliberately kept out of influential positions. The timetable also specifically designated short periods for the reading of party newspapers, in particular *L'Humanité*,

to enable the students to keep up-to-date with news, political events and, above all, the current party line.

Inevitably, there were problems of comprehension amongst the students on the demanding six-month course, as most had only an elementary education and no experience of intellectual work. On the other hand, some, "*favorisés dans leur adolescence*", were more used to studying and expressing their thoughts both in writing and speech; they were the ones to "watch" as their "judgement was sometimes deformed by the orientation of their previous studies".⁸⁹ As Pudal points out, apart from the minimum education needed to attend party schools, there was also "maximum": some committed the sin of not being sufficiently educated, others had studied too much. Therefore, to avoid any "deviation", the students' notes were checked in minute detail and then assessed.⁹⁰ The equality of all students was underlined: as an example of the equal treatment meted out Fajon describes the manner in which Maurice Thorez (whose personality cult was then beginning to grow) came to meet the students at Arcueil, "asking everybody questions about their lives and their problems, about their regions, their tasks in the Party, what they thought about the school. He willingly also answered all their questions. [...] These meetings [with the students] all helped to create a good atmosphere: I don't remember there ever being problems between the workers and the intellectuals of any '*promotion*'; co-operation and fraternity characterised all relations between the militants."⁹¹

The school's directors insisted on strict discipline, with a rigorous timetable which kept the students occupied throughout the day. Work started at 8 o'clock in the morning and continued until late at night: "*On ne perdait pas une minute, sauf pendant les récréations, où le billiard était très fréquenté.*"⁹² Each Tuesday afternoon was reserved for *travail pratique* in relevant party organisations and students were collected by car by *les camarades de banlieue* (one of whom always arrived in a hearse!). Group spirit and attachment to the Party were enhanced by excursions and by participation in "all public demonstrations which were organised in Paris" at that time. The students were even "made to feel the presence of the great Lenin" in a most concrete way by following the bicycle route Lenin had taken from Orléans to the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

The final act of bonding was, as usual, the traditional *fête de clôture* which was presided over by Marcel Cachin himself who joined the students led by “*notre Bretonne, Madeleine Marzin*” in a singsong of popular tunes.⁹³

The “total school experience” which was now operating on all three levels was thus on its way to moulding students into loyal activists who, in their turn, would provide trustworthy, predominantly working-class leadership material for the Party and its mass organisations in the battle against the hostile outside world in the most difficult circumstances imaginable, during and after the Second World War.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused primarily on the origins and the initial development of the PCF’s political education system during the Party’s early years 1920-39. It was shown that whilst there existed a desperate need for politically trained militants and cadres in the PCF, the Party was unable at the start to set up a coherent and systematic training programme to respond to that demand. This was largely due to the internal chaos in the Party and to its protracted battle against the Comintern’s domination. The PCF’s frustrated attempts to set up a permanent party school network illustrate well both the confusion and the internal chaos of the first years of its political life. They also reveal the gradually more organised but still rather fruitless pursuance of Soviet-style training as received via the Comintern instructors or the International Lenin School that characterised the implantation of Marxist-Leninist education in the PCF. It was not until the bolshevisation process was completed that the PCF leadership was able to prioritise political training, which was then entrusted to Etienne Fajon who could arguably be called the Father of communist political education in France. Once the PCF’s ideological purity and working-class domination of the leadership had been achieved as a result of the successful implementation of the bolshevisation programme, it was possible to give the political education system the basic shape, structures and stability that it would rigidly maintain for close to 60 years.

By the end of the period under scrutiny, the reorganised political training system was providing a solid basis and a sound framework for the training of large numbers of militants and cadres who had joined the PCF during the Popular Front. Having become a mass party, the PCF would now be in a position to reward its trained cadres by promoting them within its expanding apparatus. Intellectuals were no longer shunned as teachers, general cultural subjects were introduced into the teaching programme to improve the educational standards of the students, and older party members were retrained to update and improve their knowledge. Undoubtedly the permanent school network functioning on three levels also contributed to the maintenance of the recently forged party unity and cohesion after the turbulence of the previous decade. It should also be noted that already, coupled with the PCF's organisational principle of democratic centralism, the complete party education system was developing into an excellent tool for preserving the working-class leadership's pre-eminence and authority.

This, then, was the situation of the PCF and its political education system in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War. During the Occupation no organised political education was provided, and the party school network painstakingly built up by Fajon perished completely. All political education had to be restarted from the beginning following Fajon's return from Algiers, where he had spent most of the war. This will be the starting point for the next chapter: with the PCF becoming a dominant force in French politics after the war, the party education system had to be quickly resurrected and built up to train the huge numbers of new members flocking to the Party, and to cope with the new challenges presented to it by the early Cold War era.

Notes and references

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1. TIERSKY, R. *French Communism 1920-1972 op. cit.*, p. 15, quoting from KRIEGEL, A. *Aux origines du communisme français*. (Flammarion, Paris, 1969), p. 426.
 2. Ibid., p. 13.
 3. Ibid., p. 33.
 4. JOHNSON, R., *op. cit.*, p. 6, note 20.
 5. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome I, op. cit.*, p.169.
 6. TIERSKY, *French Communism, op. cit.*, p. 23.

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7. There were three major currents: a pro-Comintern minority represented by Boris Souvarine, Albert Treint and Paul Vaillant-Couturier; a small anti-Comintern group; and a central majority oscillating between the two extremes but resenting the Comintern's "excessive interference"; see ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
 8. TARTAKOWSKY, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33*, *op. cit.* My references are drawn from this thesis which was kindly lent to me by Jean Charles from Université de Besançon. The thesis has also been published as a book, *Les premiers communistes français* (Presse de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1980.)
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 25, note 2.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 11. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34. There is also a list of students in Appendix 2, p. 425.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 35 and p. 41 bis.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
 14. MORTIMER, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
 16. WALL, *op. cit.*, p. 12. Certain aspects of democratic centralism were also useful in silencing criticism, in particular that emanating from the troublesome bourgeois intellectuals; see JOHNSON, R. *op. cit.*, pp.73-4.
 17. JOHNSON, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. KRIEGEL, *The French Communists*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
 20. DEGRAS, J. ed. *The Communist International 1919-1943. Vol. II 1919-1922.*, pp. 122-23, quoted in MORTIMER, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
 22. TARTAKOWSKY, D. 'Les premières écoles centrales du PCF', *Le mouvement social*, avril-juin 1975, pp. 80.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
 24. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome I*, *op. cit.*, p. 225. Kurella was an experienced Comintern educator and secretary of the Executive Committee of the International Communist Youth. See ROBRIEUX, *Tome IV*, *op. cit.*, p. 369, for details of Kurella's educational brochures published in 1925 in which he set out the principles of the Comintern's education programme.
 25. TARTAKOWSKY, 'Les premières écoles centrales du PCF', *op. cit.*, p. 86.
 26. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome I*, *op. cit.*, p. 227. Other teachers included Fröhlich from the KPD and Abraham Guralski (also known as Kleine or Lepetit) who was the successor of the famous Comintern "eye", Jules Humbert-Droz.
 27. TARTAKOWSKY, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33*, *op. cit.*, Annexe 12, p. 453.

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28. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome I, op. cit.*, p. 225.
29. Ibid., p. 231. An extract from Kurella's teaching manual, *Rôle et Méthode de l'enseignement léniniste*, demonstrates the level of instruction:
- Le maître: Quels Etats connaissez-vous?*
Les élèves: La France, l'Angleterre, l'Amérique, l'Allemagne, le Japon.
Le maître: Tous les Etats ont-ils des empereurs ou des rois?
Les élèves: Non.
Le maître: Nommez-moi des Etats qui n'ont pas d'empereur.
Les élèves: La France, la Suisse, l'Amérique.
Le maître: Comment appelle-t-on les Etats qui n'ont pas d'empereur? Qui le sait?
Les élèves: Des républiques.
Le maître: Est-ce que l'Allemagne est une république?
Les élèves: Oui. On a chassé l'empereur Guillaume.
Le maître: On n'a donc pas besoin d'empereur?
Les élèves: Non.
Le maître: Le sort des ouvriers allemands est-il meilleur?
Les élèves: Non. Il n'y a pas grand-chose de changé à leur situation.
Le maître: Mais, en Russie, on a aussi chassé le tsar, est-ce que ça va mieux?
Les élèves: Oui, on n'a pas seulement chassé le tsar, mais on a aussi établi un gouvernement ouvrier.
Le maître: Il ne suffit donc pas de chasser le roi, il faut faire encore autre chose? Qu'a fait le gouvernement ouvrier en Russie?
Les élèves: Il a donné toutes les fabriques aux ouvriers.
Le maître: Oui. Et il a aussi rejeté l'appareil étatique tous les nobles et les bourgeois et mis des ouvriers à leur place. (See ROBRIEUX, Histoire intérieure, Tome I, op. cit., p. 230.)
30. KRIEDEL, *The French Communist, op. cit.*, p. 266. The new-style *Bulletin communiste* wrote disparagingly in November 1925: "Qu'est-ce qu'une école léniniste? C'est une réunion de pauvres types, choisis pour leur docilité et soumis à un régime d'abrutissement soigné. On leur fait annoncer des formules, réciter des clichés, singer des 'sonnets'. C'est ce qu'on a justement appelé la 'bobignisation' du parti." (*Bulletin communiste*, No. 6, 27.11.1925, cited in TARTAKOWSKY, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33, op. cit.*, p. 138) On the other hand, Albert Vassart, a former Bobigny student, added his own thoughts: "Les adversaires du Parti communiste se sont habitués à coller l'étiquette 'Bobigny' à tout ce que le PC a réalisé à partir de 1924 en matière de formation de cadres. Les amis de Souvarine ont même parlé de 'Bobignisation' du PC pour critiquer certains aspects de la bolchévisation." (VASSART, A. *Manuscrit inédit*, p. 73. Kindly lent to the author by Philippe Robrieux.)
31. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome I, op. cit.*, pp. 230-32.
32. "Class-against-class" meant working-class parties (communists) against bourgeois parties (all others, including socialists). According to Stalin, social-democracy (i.e. the Second International) was but a "wing of fascism". The Comintern's strategy therefore was to advocate "united front from below"; this meant united action over the heads of and against the resistance of social-democratic leaders who were called "social-fascists" and "social-imperialists".
33. ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
34. See DREYFUS, M. *PCF - crises et dissidences. De 1920 à nos jours*. (Editions Complexe, Bruxelles, 1990), pp. 41-50, for a detailed account of "L'affair Barbé-Celor".
35. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 159; in note 2 Pudal gives a more comprehensive list of persons involved in the Comintern team.
36. MORTIMER, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

37. WALL, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
38. In 1927, the Minister of Interior, Albert Sarraut, launched a full-scale attack against the French Communist Party under a slogan of "*Le communisme, voilà l'ennemi*". There were arrests (Thorez was arrested) and fines, the communist newspaper was seized and communist *députés* were charged with subversion and lost their parliamentary immunity. (See ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 34.)
39. TARTAKOWSKY, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33*, *op. cit.*, p. 208 and p. 201.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 208. There was also a failed attempt at developing self-study courses but the course material was poorly prepared and unsuitable for militants with a very basic level of education and no previous party training. As one teacher put it: "*Les rapports sur l'auto-éducation sont trop savants pour nous. Nous avons effectivement essayé d'éduquer nos camarades sur l'impérialisme et la guerre. Nos camarades ont lu le plan et lorsque nous avons voulu ouvrir la discussion, aucun camarade n'a participé.*" (*Ibid.*, p. 218, note 3.)
41. Fay was soon put in charge of the entire education section, a post he was to hold until 1934: "*De 1929 à 1934, je suis responsable des écoles du parti, de l'Université ouvrière (que j'avais créée), chroniqueur à L'Humanité, collaborateur aux 'Cahiers du bolchevisme', responsable de la propagande lors des grèves dans le Nord. J'étais l'homme à tout faire de l'agit-prop.*" (FAY, V., *La Flamme et la Cendre*. Presse de Vincennes, 1987, p. 69.)
42. TARTAKOWSKY, *op. cit.*, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33*. Pp. 234-49.
43. The Party also wanted to extend the education work to the peasant population as it had virtually no foothold in rural areas. On one of their student "touting" trips, Fay and Gayman found Waldeck-Rochet who was persuaded to attend a regional school. Fay wrote enthusiastically: "*Ce ne fut pas un élève comme les autres. Enfin un cadre qui dépasse le niveau régional.*" Rochet was later sent to the International Lenin School in Moscow. (FAY, *op. cit.*, p. 74.)
44. TARTAKOWSKY, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33 op. cit.*, p. 247.
45. Tartakowsky cites some examples of the grading afforded to the students: "*élève nul ou devant être placé à des responsabilités inférieures à celles qu'il occupe*"; "*peut faire un secrétaire de cellule*"; "*doit être chargé d'une tâche syndicale ou autre tâche spécialisée*".
45. TARTAKOWSKY, *Ecoles et Editions communistes 1921-33, op. cit.*, p. 254.
46. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 160. According to Pudal, this attempt to redefine activist behaviour and re-educate the activists was one of the main contributions of Thorez's political work. Thorez wrote in his *Oeuvres*: "*Or, on doit reconnaître que la direction n'a pas fait un effort suffisant non seulement pour former et éduquer de nouveaux cadres, mais aussi pour rééduquer et assimiler les anciens.*" (See PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 162.)
47. The ILS was not the only international party school run by the Comintern. Between 1921 and 1926, four schools were set up in Moscow for the training of professional revolutionaries from all over the world: the Communist University of the Workers of the East (KUTV) in April 1921; the Communist University for Western Ethnic Minorities (KUNMZ) in November 1921; the Sun-yat-sen University for Chinese Communists in 1925; and the International Lenin School in 1926. (See LAZITCH, B., 'La formation des cadres dirigeants', *Pouvoirs*, No. 21, 1982, p. 40.)
48. LAZITCH, B., 'Les écoles de cadres du Comintern', in FREYMOND, J.(ed.) *Contributions à l'histoire du Comintern*, 1965, p. 238.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 239, note 16.
50. VAN DIGGELEN, M. (now KIVISAARI, M.), 'Communist Party Education in Finland: From Red

Flags to Wine Tasting', *op. cit.*, p. 489.

51. LAZITCH, 'La formation des cadres dirigeants', *op. cit.*, pp. 40-1.
52. VAN DIGGELEN, M. (now KIVISAARI, M.), 'Communist Party Education in Finland ...', *op. cit.*, p. 489.
53. TUOMINEN, A., *Kremlin kellot*. (Helsinki, Tammi, 1956), p. 57.
54. LAZITCH, 'La formation des cadres dirigeants', *op. cit.*, p. 41. On the other hand, the "best" student of the first French student group sent to Moscow in 1927-28, Paul Marion - who taught at Bobigny - ended his political career as the Minister of Information of Marshal Pétain's government.
55. LAZITCH, 'Les écoles de cadres du Comintern', *op. cit.*, p. 241.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50. Lazitch notes that "it is significant that the defender of the official line was to become the general secretary of the French Communist Party [1964-72]".
57. Léo Figuères, who had studied at the ILS in 1937, wrote: "*Cette promotion devait d'ailleurs être l'une des meilleures car, à une ou deux exceptions près, ses membres, qu'ils fussent du Parti ou des Jeunesses communistes, devaient se comporter admirablement dans des luttes qui les attendaient au cours des années suivantes.*" (FIGUÈRES, L., *Jeunesse militante*. (Editions sociales, 1977), p. 73.)
58. RACINE, N. & BODIN, L., *Le Parti communiste français entre les deux guerres*. (1972), p. 208. "*A tout prix, pour battre le fascisme, constituons un large front populaire*", Thorez wrote on 10th October 1934 and on 29th October 1934, he continued: "[...] *que se constitue face au front de la réaction et du fascisme le front populaire de la liberté, du travail et du pain.*"
59. PUDAL, *op.cit.*, p. 21. In fact, the PCF's earlier moves to extend alliance policy to include the Radicals had been praised by Dimitrov for having set an example to all sections of the Comintern. But for many other communist parties the Comintern's change of strategy came too late and the preceding "class-against-class" tactic was a major factor in the collapse of the CPs in a number of countries, for example Italy, Germany, Finland and Australia.
60. During the later stages of the Popular Front the PCF came to regret its decision and offered, unsuccessfully, to participate in the two Chautemps governments, Blum's second government and even in the Daladier government.
61. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome I*, *op. cit.*, p. 461. The Congress itself followed the same method and the headline of *L'Humanité* the next day was triumphant: "*Le Parti uni comme un bloc autour de son comité central!*" *Ibid.*, p. 464.
62. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
64. BRUNET, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
65. FAJON, E., 'Pour un plan d'éducation dans chaque région', *Cahiers du bolchevisme*, no. 9, 1.5.1935, p. 562.
66. Fajon was an *instituteur* but had become a *permanent* of the Party in the 1930s and was in charge of the party paper *Le Travailleur du Languedoc*. His party career took off when he was propelled into the Central Committee as a *suppléant* in the 1932 Congress. He is thought to have attended the International Lenin School in the 1930s but no proof exists. Fajon became one of the Popular Front's communist *députés* in 1936, rose to the Politbureau as a full member in 1947, and was the

editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité* in 1958-74. Fajon was one of the PCF's most indefatigable workhorses directing the PCF's education section 1935-48 and again in 1974-79. In the words of Robrieux, Fajon was "*inébranlable; dans le sillage de Maurice Thorez, il est un des soutiens inconditionnels du conservatisme. [...] kominformiste, philo-soviétique convaincu et discipliné, sorte de petit Souslov à la française, il est un des produits les plus caractéristiques de l'ère glaciaire du communisme français.*" (See ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome IV, op. cit.*, pp. 204-209.)

67. *Guide du professeur des écoles élémentaires*. Archives Marty, Carton P, VIII-XVI. Université de Paris, Centre de recherches d'histoire des mouvements sociaux et du syndicalisme (CRHMSS).
68. FAJON, 'Pour un plan d'éducation dans chaque région', *op. cit.*, p. 566.
69. FAJON, E., *Ma vie s'appelle Liberté*. (Laffont, 1976), p. 81.
70. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
71. Among them were Fried, Pauker and Gerö.
72. See ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome IV, op. cit.*, p. 454, for further details.
73. FAJON, *Ma vie s'appelle Liberté, op. cit.*, p. 83.
74. *Guide du professeur, op. cit.*
75. *Ecole élémentaire du Rayon du 13e arrondissement de la Région Paris-Ville*. Archives Marty, Carton P, VIII-XVI, Université de Paris, CRHMSS.
76. FAJON, *Ma vie s'appelle Liberté, op. cit.*, p. 84.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
78. BOUTHONNIER, P., 'A propos de la formation des cadres du Parti', *Cahiers du bolchevisme*, no. 14-15, 25 août 1936, pp. 974-76.
79. FAJON, *Ma vie s'appelle Liberté, op. cit.*, p. 85. Fajon writes that the school's isolated location made the teachers' journeys more than laborious, but true to form, "*La longueur de cette randonnée ne découragea pas nos conférenciers, tant l'importance du travail d'éducation était chaque jour mieux comprise.*" (p. 86)
80. CARESMEL, A., 'L'organisation des écoles du Parti', *Cahiers du bolchevisme*, no. 16-17, 1er octobre 1936, pp. 1117-1118.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 1116.
82. *Ibid.*, pp. 1118-1119.
83. Interview with Etienne Fajon, 13.9.1991, at the PCF headquarters, 2 place du Colonel-Fabien, Paris.
84. FAJON, *Ma vie s'appelle Liberté, op. cit.*, p. 88. In fact, the ILS was in the midst of Stalin's purges and had virtually ceased its activities. However, as Fajon put it, although there was no question of "*franciser le marxisme*", it was now considered necessary to take into consideration the particular situation in France and transform it on the basis of Marxist analysis and principles.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90. Throughout the years, this was a point made *ad infinitum* by virtually all the trainees: "*la soif d'apprendre*" overcame the most complex difficulties encountered by the students who were deeply aware of their privilege to study and learn. PUDAL emphasises the same point: see *op. cit.*, pp. 212-227 for his description of Thorez and other leaders who all studied assiduously

and systematically succeeding against all odds. This was an important part of the mythology constructed around the person of the “ideal Communist”.

86. Ibid., p. 91.
87. Ibid., p. 93.
88. GLAUBHAUF, F., ‘Mon travail à l’école d’Arcueil du Parti communiste français’, *Cahiers d’histoire de l’Institut Maurice Thorez*, No. 7, 1974, p. 156.
89. FAJON, *Ma vie s’appelle liberté, op. cit.*, p. 95.
90. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 174-75.
91. FAJON, *Ma vie s’appelle Liberté, op. cit.*, p. 96.
92. GLAUBHAUF, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-59.
93. Ibid., p. 160.

CHAPTER 4

FROM GOVERNMENT TO GHETTO (1944-64)

The re-launching of the PCF's political training network in 1944-47 and its subsequent organisation and functioning up to the end of the Thorezian era in 1964 provide the setting for this chapter.

To start with, we shall examine the immediate postwar period, when the PCF became the dominant party in French politics, performing brilliantly in elections and participating in postwar governments. A short account of the general political background and of a specific party context will provide a useful point of departure for a closer examination of the re-launching of the political education system. From extremely meagre beginnings, the PCF was able not only to reconstruct, in a very quick and systematic manner, an extensive school network but also to considerably increase its propaganda output and general activity amongst the French population through its various mass movements.

The backdrop for the second part of this chapter will be the changing political circumstances in France from the end of the "tripartite" period in 1947 to the bombshell of the 1956 Khrushchev report and the end of Thorez's leadership of the PCF. During this period, the political isolation of the PCF became an undeniable fact, and the Party found itself in the bizarre circumstances of still being France's biggest party in electoral terms and yet reduced to operating at a level quite disproportionate to its size and representativeness. This complex political situation obviously raised fresh theoretical and practical problems, to which the resurrected party education system had to respond in order to ensure that members, militants and cadres would be theoretically equipped to deal with the changes from the correct ideological standpoint.

"Le Parti des Fusillés"

Thanks to its Resistance experience, the PCF emerged from the war organised, disciplined and motivated and basking in the prestige of the victorious Red Army. The Party enjoyed a series of glorious electoral successes: in the 1945 legislative elections it won 26% of the vote, in June 1946 26.2% and in November 1946 28.6%. There were communist ministers in all postwar governments up to May 1947 (save for the one-month socialist government of Léon Blum in December 1946). The communist participation in government was considered to be an efficient, pragmatic and competent performance, and their contribution to the reconstruction programme, political and economic co-operation and the introduction of important social measures gave the Party both credibility and experience which in turn further increased its popularity and its already swelling membership.

The famous party slogan in 1945 was “*produire, produire, produire!*”. Producing was now the “highest form of class duty” as it “strengthened the unity of the working class with the working people of the middle class, with the peasant masses, in order to ensure the country’s existence”.¹ The PCF’s new moderate line was also reflected in the reunified CGT, which advocated wage restraint: not a single strike took place under the communist Minister of Labour, Ambroise Croizat, while de Gaulle remained head of government. Yet, the Party’s role in the postwar period was somewhat controversial. On the one hand it was seen as a creeping infiltration of the state and on the other, as evidence of a real desire to integrate legally which, given the chance, might have produced an authentic form of French communism independent from the Soviet brand. There was a kernel of truth in both visions. The PCF systematically sought to penetrate the welfare state machinery, for example, in order to create a “more advanced democracy”. However, at the same time, as a government party, it was obliged to tone down its objectives. Hence, in November 1946, Maurice Thorez gave his famous reassuring interview to *Times* declaring that there were “other paths to socialism than the one followed by the Russian Communists” and that there was a specifically “French road” which was democratic and, by extension, peaceful.²

The first meeting of the Party’s Central Committee since 1939 was held in August 1944 under the presidency of Marcel Cachin, since Maurice Thorez was still in Moscow

waiting for an amnesty for desertion in October 1939. One of the spin-offs of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, which had been necessitated by the political situation in France and signed by Stalin and de Gaulle, was the amnesty of Thorez; he was able to return to France in November 1944 (with Stalin's instructions to fully adhere to the government line as directed by de Gaulle).³ Although the PCF had a carefully selected, working-class leadership there were tensions and differences among those Communists who had spent the war years in Algiers (the deputies who, as the party legend went, had followed *le chemin de l'honneur* having been deported to Algiers), those who had escaped to Moscow (notably Thorez and his wife Jeannette Vermeersch) and the Paris-based leadership of Duclos, Frachon and Lecoeur. In addition, the Resistance leaders found it difficult to adjust to reimposed party discipline: Auguste Lecoeur, the PCF's illustrious Resistance hero, spoke of Communist Frenchmen as opposed to French Communists.⁴ Consequently, the internal party machine faced three main tasks. First, the prewar leadership had to regain complete control; second, the Party had to establish an "acceptable" war record for 1939-44 (in particular, a plausible interpretation for the period 1939-41); and third, the huge numbers of new members flocking to the Party had to be integrated, assimilated and politically trained.

The first problem was tackled progressively over several years by keeping Resistance leaders away from responsible positions in the Party, and by finally purging them in the early 1950s. To deal with the second problem it was necessary to demonstrate that anything and everything to do with the Resistance and heroism had in fact emanated from the old leadership. Thus, a complete memorial myth was woven around the Communist martyrs to give all the credit to the Party.⁵ The isolated acts of resistance (disapproved by the Party at the time) against the Germans before June 1941 were now cited as proof that the Party had not been wrong at the beginning of the war. As for Maurice Thorez, it was thanks to the "*magnifique appel lancé dès le 10 juillet 1940 par Maurice Thorez et Jacques Duclos*" that Paris, finally, had liberated itself.⁶

The third task facing the PCF - assimilating and integrating the mass of new members - was, then, closely linked to the first two as it involved the training and subsequent promotion of a new generation of Communists, most of whom lacked both theoretical

knowledge and practical experience and knew virtually nothing about the Party's past. This task also included the retraining of those surviving militants who had "remained prisoners of *formules dépassées*".⁷ Reliable cadres were urgently needed to operate in the Party's multilevel internal apparatus and to serve the Party in the public services, works councils, social security system, nationalised companies, municipalities and mass organisations. The Party was also setting up a complete "commercial circuit" in capitalist style: publishing houses, press services, banks and other commercial enterprises where both specialist knowledge and political training were needed.

Resurrecting the education network

The last central schools had been held in 1936-39, and during the PCF's clandestinity the party school network had completely perished. Some elementary schools had been run sporadically in great secrecy during the war, and brochures had been printed and smuggled in from Switzerland.⁸ However, it was only after the Liberation that Etienne Fajon, returning from Algiers, was able to start picking up the pieces again in order to relaunch the political training programme. The prewar central school premises at Arcueil were used again to start with but because of "difficult material conditions" (the building was now too cramped) the school was moved to Viroflay in the Paris region at the end of 1945. The elementary and federal school networks were restarted at the same time. Despite the hard core of fully indoctrinated and dedicated militants, there was a shortage of trained and politically sound instructors at all levels given that so many leading cadres had perished during the war (for example, Fajon's colleagues Georges Politzer and Jacques Solomon had been shot by the Nazis).⁹

Marcel Rosette, the future communist mayor, senator and member of the Central Committee, who was to direct the Party's central schools in 1956-63 (his background will be discussed below), paints a vivid picture of the resumption of training activities in the immediate postwar period:¹⁰

"Les cadres ne pouvaient pas se former par la seule expérience quotidienne, il fallait un bagage théorique. Il fallait passer par les écoles - à l'époque, la question ne se posait même pas! Je veux dire que c'était

chose normale que d'aller à l'école! Une chose normale! ... Moi, aussitôt la guerre terminée, j'étais dans l'école élémentaire de mon village [près de Bourg-en-Bresse]. 360 habitants et on était tous les membres de la cellule. On a fait l'école, on a suivi les cours, on avait les brochures; on a fait l'école pendant cinq semaines de suite. Quelqu'un présentait les brochures, les cours; après, il y avait des discussions. Il y avait des ouvriers, des paysans, et dans toute la France, c'était comme ça! Eh oui!"

According to official party reports,¹¹ by 1947 the school network was running fairly satisfactorily: in 1945-47, three central schools (two of 3 months, one of 4 months) with 93 students took place and in addition, there were 14 specialised central schools (3-4 weeks) for various sectors of activity (party organisation, press, education, etc.) or for mass movement activists (peasants, women, youth, trade unions). 381 students attended these schools. Apart from the central school programme, the Party organised 234 two-week federal and interfederal schools for 4453 students during the same period. In order to accommodate the vast numbers of students, the elementary schools were divided into three main groups: preparatory courses during electoral campaigns for section committee and cell bureau members; basic Marxist-Leninist training courses for party members; and elementary schools based on six brochures in section schools.

Statistics show the immense scale of the immediate postwar "education enterprise": in 1946, the circulation of the party internal education bulletin, *APPRENDRE*, rose from 10 000 to 20 000 copies; in August 1945, 15 000 *cours électoraux* were printed and in April 1946, this number had increased to 20 000. In September 1945, 100 000 copies of each elementary school brochure were distributed to party members (a total of 600 000). In July 1946, 20 000 copies of each Marxist-Leninist training course brochure were published in a series of four brochures, i.e. a total of 80 000. The party rules were also considered to be essential study material and in November 1946, 700 000 copies were printed, in addition to the 375 000 copies already distributed in January 1946. The number of internal party documents published between July 1945 and December 1946 (study materials, journals, information leaflets, party rules, etc.) was 3 912 000 and the total number of brochures (propaganda material, etc.) was 10 168 000. Between June 1945 and December 1946, an astonishing 86 million tracts - propaganda publications presenting various aspects of the PCF policy and achievements such as "*Les ministres*

communistes au travail", "*Les députés communistes au service du peuple et de la République*" and "*Des Français en qui on peut avoir confiance*" - were published.¹²

The organisation and functioning of the party schools

Elementary schools were aimed at ordinary party members as the first stage in the process which was to mould them into trained militants by teaching them the rudiments of Marxist culture. In principle, all members were expected to attend, and each section was to organise one or two schools a year with a minimum of ten students. The elementary schools had six weekly sessions which were based on party-produced brochures detailing the programme of each lesson.

A typical elementary school¹³ would be run as follows: the opening session (*séance d'ouverture*) outlined the material organisation of the school - timetable, meeting place (party headquarters, a private home, the backroom of a café), the organisation and objectives. As from the second session, each lesson began with a revision of the previous one (15 minutes). Then, under the guidance of a comrade of the superior echelon (federation), students discussed the questions evoked in the brochure which they had studied in advance. Discussions were 'free' but the *responsable* was supposed to intervene in order to correct "a grave political error". The closing session (*séance de clôture*) was devoted to a *critique de l'école*: students were asked to evaluate the school and the teachers' performance and to suggest improvements where appropriate. Finally, the director of the elementary school prepared a report on the functioning of the school and on the students; the student reports played an important role in the promotion of the students to the Section Committee.

Permanent federal schools were permanent in the true sense of the word until 1949, after which they were only organised four or five times a year as student numbers began to drop. Although each federation organised its own school, they all functioned according to the general guidelines issued by the Central Committee. Students were mainly members of the section bureaux and those under 30 years of age constituted a specific target group (the upper age limit for federal school students was 35-40). Courses lasted

two weeks and the aim was to give the students enough theoretical knowledge to enable them to act independently in order to implement the party line. In fact, at the end of the intensive two-week period the federal school students often felt quite cut off from reality before they learned how to usefully apply their new-found knowledge and to think “*en communiste*”: “*Le militant quitte l’école pénétré de théorie et il lui faudra quelque temps pour retrouver une vision plus réaliste des choses.*”¹⁴ The importance of the two-week federal school at this stage was that it made the students realise that they were in fact on their way to joining the cadre group of the Party. This “promise” of new responsibilities further strengthened their conviction and justified the time spent on the course. The best students also got a taste and motivation for additional study which would win them further promotion within the party or its mass organisations (see Chapter 2).

Finally, the central schools, the apex of the system, trained experienced Communists - “good militants” already in responsible positions but needing to perfect their theoretical education - for higher leadership positions in the Party.¹⁵ Consequently, students were mainly federation leaders, deputies (MPs), and leaders of mass organisations at national level. Courses generally lasted between one and four months and focused on a greatly expanded syllabus which was more detailed than that of the federal schools (history, political economy, Marxist philosophy, public speaking, organisational leadership, and so on). Teachers were usually drawn from the ranks of the Central Committee, the Politbureau and the Party Secretariat. Apart from having considerable militant and political experience, central school students had to be long-time party members who had proven themselves completely reliable politically. Students were paid their normal salary in full for the whole school period so that they could concentrate entirely on their studies. At the end of the school they were required to give an assessment of the school and the teachers; likewise, the teachers in turn submitted detailed reports on each student for cadre promotion purposes.¹⁶ Thus, as indicated in Chapter 2, more advanced degrees of ideological training went hand-in-hand with more advanced degrees of involvement, commitment and higher rewards.

A central school programme of 1947¹⁷ will serve as an illustration of a typical postwar training course at the highest level. The one-month school organised for promising militants working in the trade union movement took place in July 1947 with 23 students from 22 federations. The director of the school was Victor Joannès (the best student on the first permanent six-month central school under Fritz Glaubhauf in 1937 and by now risen to become a member of the Central Committee; see Chapter 3) and the students represented mainly the steel and building industries (nine and seven respectively). Eight had been party members before the war, four had joined during the clandestine period and eleven since 1944. Thirteen students had federal-level responsibilities and five were section leaders. Ages ranged between 25 and 35. Only one woman attended this central school (see note 16). The extensive study programme included 11 *cours généraux* (including the topical theme of “*La question de la guerre et les problèmes de la Paix*”) and 12 *cours spéciaux* focusing on trade union related issues (for example, “*Le syndicat et les problèmes de la production*”, a lecture given by the communist minister Charles Tillon). Practical work was also included in the form of article and tract writing, and the preparation of meetings and work plans for trade union branches. Guided visits took place to the railways’ repair shop at Vitry, the *Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers*, the Renault factory at Billancourt and the *Musée d’Histoire* in Montreuil. The students also participated in the demonstration on 14th July to celebrate Bastille Day. The school’s film programme was a mixture of nationalism and communism: “*La Marseillaise*” and “*Lénine en octobre*”.

At all levels students were required to study congress reports, speeches, brochures, the party press and Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist classics. There were precise instructions for reading the party press, in particular *L’Humanité*: the militants were expected to glance through the party organ every morning before going to work in order to familiarise themselves with the principal themes and articles. By the end of the morning or “by midday the latest”, the main articles written by party leaders Cachin and Cogniot had to be read while the whole paper was supposed to be scrutinised by the evening so that useful articles could be cut out and filed away for further reference.¹⁸ In 1947, emotional links with the heroic Soviet comrades (see Chapter 2) were strengthened through the “recommended reading list” which included the following, carefully prescribed novels

originating from the USSR: "*La chaussée de Volokolamsk*" by Alexander Beck, "*Les Indomptés*" by Boris Gorbatoov, "*Les Jours et les Nuits de Stalingrad*" by Konstantin Simonov, "*L'Invasion*" by Leonid Leonov and "*L'Arc-en-ciel*" by Wanda Wasilewska.¹⁹ Apart from Soviet films, the education section bulletin *APPRENDRE* also recommended French (communist) made documentaries: "*A la conquête du bonheur*" (Paris rising from the ruins after the Liberation, thanks to the efforts of the working class, guided by the PC); and "*Renaissance*" in which communist *élus* were organising the reconstruction of their towns and villages, "*ces ouvriers, ces paysans de notre Parti, devenus des administrateurs modèles*".²⁰

APPRENDRE regularly reported on the organisation and functioning of party schools (see APPENDICES 1 and 2, p. 235), mainly to praise those which had made a good effort and to criticise those which were lagging behind and needed tighter control. In the December 1946 issue²¹ the bulletin concerned itself with the federal schools: "The successive federal schools have caused a slowing down of the education work. Many federal schools have not been able to function, but this lagging behind must be remedied. [...] All too often, [the federations] are blaming material and financial difficulties [for their lack of enthusiasm]. However, these difficulties can be overcome, and we can give examples of federal schools which will serve as an inspiration for our comrades!" The report sent in by the Indre-et-Loire federation provides an illuminating example of the purpose of the complete "training experience": not only did the students attend school in order to be politically educated but also to learn the importance of *esprit de parti* and solidarity:

"Our school took place on a farm in a commune about 10 kilometres from Tours. The farmer let us have three rooms in the house: one for cooking and eating, another for sleeping in and the third as a classroom. The Party lent us beds and chairs and straw mattresses. Cooking utensils were lent by a local hotelier and the farmer. Furniture for the classroom was also provided by the Party. The three women students stayed with the mayor.

The rooms were decorated with photographs of our comrades of the Central Committee, with greenery and branches. Boxwood branches were shaped to read: 'Apprendre pour mieux lutter.' The school was well organised and there were three copious meals every day. Communal living, good discipline and studying in a group produced excellent results, creating a team spirit, a feeling of solidarity, and developing our competitive and party spirit.

Because the students are not occupied by their everyday life after school hours, they can fully concentrate on their work here; the intellectual yield is excellent...

The farmer was won over by our example and dynamism and he joined the Party at the end of the school. So did the young girl who was employed to do the cooking (and who up to that time was inorganisée)."

The comments of *APPRENDRE* need no further elaboration: "*Qu'en pensez-vous, camarades des autres fédérations?*"

"Le grand schisme"

The rapid progress of the PCF's political training system described above shows the Party's determination to satisfy its immediate need for militants and cadres in the crucial early postwar period. By 1947, however, the PCF was facing new national and international challenges. On the national level, the communist participation in government came to an end in May 1947; on the international level, the proclamation of the Truman doctrine and the September 1947 Zhdanov report marked the beginning of the Cold War.

The departure of the communist ministers from the government in May 1947 and the emergence of de Gaulle's *Rassemblement du peuple français* (RPF) altered the entire political scene in France for years to come. Both the Communists and the RPF were ruled out as potential coalition partners, and anti-communism became the focus of the governments of the so-called *troisième force*. "*Le grand schisme*" of the left was so deep that, throughout the early period of the Cold War, the PCF - despite still being France's biggest party in electoral terms - was inescapably reduced to more or less symbolic actions²² which, moreover, had to be carried out through ancillary organisations rather than the official party structure. Thus, excluded from governmental coalitions and gradually eliminated from its *positions acquises* in society, the PCF was henceforth guided by the Unholy Trinity of the Soviet Union, the Cominform (which was set up in 1947 to replace the Comintern)²³ and Stalin. As a result, the party policies and slogans underwent a radical change. The Cold War strategy of the PCF came under three main themes: the struggle for national independence; the struggle for peace; and

a government of democratic union.²⁴ All themes were faithfully reproduced by the political training programme.

The first slogan, “the struggle for national independence”, was mostly concerned with the Party’s battle against American imperialism and directed against the Marshall Plan, “the plan of enslavement and war”, which was officially introduced by the USA in June 1947. The Plan was condemned as “an imperialist trap” which was designed - amongst other things - to thwart the industrialisation of the countries aided, France included, and thus to “put their national independence under threat”.²⁵

The second theme, “the struggle for peace”, became the mainstay of the communist strategy as it enabled the Party to break through its isolation whilst simultaneously furthering Soviet foreign policy objectives. In 1948, the Communists succeeded in merging the two existing peace movements in France as the *Mouvement de la Paix* and by 1949, they controlled the whole organisation.²⁶ The peace issue not only became an excellent *terrain d’entente* for the PCF; the movement itself was to serve as one of the points of connection between Communists and non-Communists and to keep the PCF fully occupied, as endless signature campaigns were run during the next few years.²⁷ The Peace Movement was also generally popular because of fears of another war and of German rearmament; in addition, its platform was vague enough so as not to advertise too obvious a communist domination.

The third theme was that of a “government of democratic union”. The PCF proclaimed that the peace could be “definitely” saved and national independence recovered only by a change of policy and a “government of democratic union”, namely a government “in which the working class and its communist party would have the place they deserved alongside other democrats who are sincerely dedicated to justice and liberty”. Such a government, although led by the Communists and modelled after the first governments in the People’s Democracies, would also include socialist and Christian groups.²⁸

The PCF's internal life during this period was characterised by two main factors: the increasing leadership conflicts and the growth and consolidation of the communist "countercommunity" and sub-culture.

The hardening of the party line after 1947 made it necessary to close ranks and "purify" the top leadership. As a result, the purge of the *anciens résistants*²⁹ at the 12th party congress in April 1950 set in motion a period of prolonged internal confusion which was further aggravated by the sudden illness of Secretary-General Maurice Thorez in October 1950 and his subsequent departure (for specialist treatment) to Moscow, where he remained until April 1953. The rudderless PCF underwent a series of conflicting and confusing *tournants* as the different factions fought for control and other prominent party leaders were purged (notably Thorez's dauphin Auguste Lecoœur, André Marty and Charles Tillon).

Thorez was trying to direct the PCF from the Soviet Union; in order to counteract the threat of any further weakening of his position, his closest supporters decided to give a new impetus to his cult of personality. This carefully orchestrated programme strengthened Thorez's position despite his physical absence, and his invisible leadership in fact became one of the most unifying elements of party life, in particular as the communist countercommunity (or countersociety, as some observers call it) had by that time become sufficiently solid and systematically organised to survive.³⁰ During this early Cold War period the countercommunity became more definable and more inflexible as it concentrated on reinforcing and consolidating its lifestyle. "The Communist Party does not only take an interest in its militants, it also takes care of their families, their wives, their children. It does not snatch the *combattant du peuple* from his or her family but integrates this family in the fraternal phalanx of the *combattants du peuple* ... The Party never forgets those it holds dear to its heart!" wrote Thorez in *Fils du Peuple*.³¹ Any clear distinction between the public and private life of the militants disappeared: in addition to party work, there was trade union work, activities in party-linked organisations, party political training, outings, picnics, fêtes, *bals populaires*, carnivals, etc. Family life revolved around party activities as militants often married militants and their children subsequently joined the communist youth

organisations. In the words of Claude Poperen, central school student in 1954 and 1959-60 and a future member of the Central Committee and Politbureau, the 1950s communist countercommunity was a “total experience”: “If you went to a dance, it was a dance organised by the Party or by the Communist Youth. Almost all my friends were in the Party or the trade union [CGT-Renault, Billancourt]. Hobbies, study and leisure time were all linked to the Party. *Le Parti, c’était tout; ma vie, c’était le Parti.*”³²

“Apprendre pour mieux lutter”

The new political developments raised fresh theoretical and practical problems, and called for changes in the existing teaching programmes as well as for the introduction of new themes and methods in keeping with the instructions of Cominform. To this end, a *Section centrale du travail idéologique* headed by François Billoux was set up to work directly under the leadership. As Annie Kriegel put it, the section soon became “*le centre d’impulsion, dans son domaine de compétence, de la stalinisation du Parti*”.³³ A major initiative undertaken by the new section in the 1950s was the launching of a structured, systematic personal study programme (*Etude individuelle*) based principally on Thorez’s autobiography *Fils du Peuple*, Stalin’s *L’Histoire du PC(B) de l’URSS*, Thorez’s *Oeuvres* and the communist classics.

The first *année d’études* of the home study programme was officially inaugurated on the 14th anniversary of the publication of *Fils du Peuple*, on 26th October 1951. The aim of the programme was twofold: to encourage the militants to study at home, supported by their local party organisations and by a personal *conseiller d’étude*, and at the same time, to increase Thorez’s personality cult and his authority in the Party by structuring the study programme around his works. Planning was meticulous: after enrolment for the complete academic year, the students attended a *séance solennelle d’ouverture* to mark the importance of the step they had just taken. They then got down to the work which was presented to them in the party education bulletin *APPRENDRE* and the theoretical journal *Cahiers du communisme* in the form of monthly programmes. The most important of Thorez’s *Oeuvres* was, of course, *Fils du Peuple*. Using this as a text book, the life of the “ideal Communist” was studied systematically chapter by chapter,

“attentivement, la plume à la main”. In Bernard Pudal’s words, the biography was the complete apprenticeship manual for the aspiring activist in which Thorez “lends his personality to an exemplary trajectory, namely that of the political promotion of a working-class communist militant”.³⁴ More able students would extend their study by making use of the numerous references made to *L’Histoire du PC(B)*, and to the classics of Marxism-Leninism.³⁵

The study method was simple: students noted down difficult passages, looked up all unfamiliar words in a dictionary, and read again. Exercise books and their correct use played an important part: the left-hand pages were divided into three columns, first for noting down salient points, then for their explanations, and finally, for the theoretical ideas emerging from them. On the right-hand pages students wrote down the ideas gleaned from the text in the light of their own militant experience (see APPENDIX 3, p. 236). Finally, each reference to *Oeuvres* or *L’Histoire du PC(B)* given in the study programme was studied separately.³⁶

In the spring of 1952 *APPRENDRE* published an interim assessment of the personal study programme, *“un bilan satisfaisant”*. Thousands of militants had enrolled, and after five months of diligently mining the prescribed texts for priceless nuggets of theoretical truth, they were now “convinced that studying theoretical works greatly facilitated the application of the Party’s political line” because “it was better understood”.³⁷

In the following years, the study of Thorez’ *Oeuvres* was made even more systematic, and topical issues linked to the current political situation were added to the programme (for example, in October 1952, the topical theme was the draft amendment of the Statutes of the Constitution of the CPSU(B)). In addition to the monthly study programmes, *France Nouvelle* ran question-and-answer columns linked to the study themes, and special *conférences éducatives* were written by Central Committee members.

Closely linked with the personal study programme was the intensive campaign launched in 1950 to publish and distribute antiwar and “progressive” literature on the orders of Cominform. This was the “*bataille du livre*”, which was intended to play “a decisive part in the struggle for Peace”. Moreover, the production and distribution of “suitable” literature for the ordinary party members and their families or “less engaged” friends was a logical step from the theoretical and political brochure aimed at the militants.³⁸

The *bataille du livre* was not only used to popularise the struggle for peace, it was also simply an additional counterattack against American literature, “*la littérature pourrie*”. As a result, many mediocre and “parochial” writers suddenly found fame with an enthusiastic audience - and what was more, a dream audience as it was mainly working-class, which, in Kriegel’s words was, in accordance with the criteria of the period, “*doublement méritoire et exaltant!*”.³⁹

Linked to the book campaign was the creation of special party libraries, *bibliothèques de la bataille du livre (BBL)*, which were set up in the offices of party cells, sections and mass organisations. The literature stocked in them was divided into four sections: (1) the basic works of Stalin and Thorez; (2) works “absolutely indispensable for a cell” such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, more Stalin, and party publications; (3) works qualified as “*une série d’ouvrages plus gros et aussi très importants*”, i.e. more Lenin and Stalin and theoretical publications; (4) a special section for Soviet novels, “carefully selected amongst the best”.⁴⁰

The school experience

We shall now examine some of the early Cold War themes and the everyday reality of the party schools. This is a vast area, but three examples will serve to evoke the style, political content and ethos of the period. These are “*La politique communiste*” as taught in the elementary schools in 1949; the description of a three-week central school for *instituteurs* in 1952; and finally, personal accounts of teachers and students both in the PCF’s central schools and the International Cadre School in Moscow.

"La politique communiste"

This elementary school brochure devoted to the party policy in 1949 spelled out clearly the themes of national independence and peace: "The political line of the Party is determined by the new international situation and by the American plan of enslavement and war." Blum and de Gaulle were "the American agents in France"; party policy was based on "union and action - Peace must be saved"; the Politbureau affirmed its solidarity with the USSR by declaring that "the people of France will not, will never go to war against the Soviet Union". Only a government of democratic union - the third main theme - would guarantee French independence and Peace. Thus, "all together, under the flag of national independence, fighting for '*la Paix, le Pain et la Liberté*', we shall save France". Under the heading of "Socialism and Communism", the glorious achievements of the USSR were painted in glowing colours: "The Soviet Union is the only country which has, at present, achieved the stage of socialism and which is marching boldly towards the building of communism." The brochure was adorned with pictures and drawings of Soviet achievements: the tall chimneys of the Stalin Factory at Magnitogorsk; machinery at work at the Dimitrov Kolkhoz in Moldavia; combine harvesters working in Soviet fields and a certain N. N. Kuklina, a Stakhanovist worker, organising a village laboratory. The brochure ended, as usual, with a questionnaire monitoring the student's progress throughout the lesson.

Comrade Vagneron, a primary school teacher from Besançon, attended a special three-week central school course for primary school teachers in September 1952. The study programme was divided into five basic *cours* covering theoretical questions, five specialised lessons ("*De la religion*", "*Caractère et contenu de classe d'enseignement*", "*Social-démocratie et Front unique*", "*Parti et syndicats*", "*Les problèmes de la presse*") and four main lectures specially aimed at the *instituteur* audience. Five more themes appeared under *travaux dirigés*: "*Notre philosophie*", "*Le 19ème Congrès du PC (B) et le projet des statuts*", "*Notre politique d'union avec les catholiques*", "*Le Parti et la défense de la laïcité*" and "*Sur les méthodes d'enseignement*". As to practical work, the students had to prepare a general assembly for the autumn's *rentrée*.

Prescribed reading included the usual selection consisting of *Fils du Peuple*, *Histoire du PC(B)*, Lenin, Stalin, Zhdanov, Suslov, Cherpakov, as well as speeches, interventions and articles by the PCF leadership.⁴¹

Training in action

Marcel Rosette became the director of the PCF's Central School in Viroflay (Yvelines) in 1956 after having been through the training process himself. Rosette's rise through the "system" is a triumph for the party schools: born in 1925 and a party member since 1942, he first worked in a factory for a year but became a full-time party official (first secretary of the Ain Federation of the PCF) in 1948 after participating in the elementary school in 1945, federal school in 1946 and the one-month central school in 1948. Rosette's rise continued after the four-month central school in 1951 and he was elected to the Central Committee in 1956. In the same year he also became the director of the Central School in Viroflay (Yvelines) and remained in that post until 1963. He gives the following description of the functioning of the Central School in the 1950s:⁴²

"The daily programme in the Central School consisted of three stages: a lesson in the morning, a lecture in the afternoon with continued study late into the night and a "répétition" between 8.30 and 9.30 the next morning before lessons started. This was followed by a discussion or a debate. The students also had "travaux dirigés": they were given written questions in advance and, after doing the necessary reading, wrote down their answers which were then discussed in a group. Practical work might involve the preparation of a tract or a speech. Saturdays were devoted to a "revue de presse": the students were given the morning's papers (of all political persuasions), and in the afternoon, a discussion took place on the basis of the newspaper reports. A couple of political topics were usually chosen for closer examination of the various standpoints - it was all very interesting, and we discussed what the others were saying ..."

According to Rosette, there were some 30 students on each four-month course (two courses were organised each year) and 35-40 students on the one-month courses (8-10 courses a year) in the 1950s. The students were predominantly workers with very little formal education. They were carefully selected and the main rule was that "all cadres went to school, at all levels".

Jean Récanati, a journalist with *L'Humanité*, has described his personal “learning experience” in his autobiography “*Un gentil stalinien*”.⁴³ He had joined the *Jeunesse Communiste* in 1944 at the age of 19; typically for that period, his reason for joining was his “great admiration for the Communists, especially for the Soviet Union, which was winning the war”. Nine years later, in March 1953 (on the day Stalin died), he found himself in the Central School “*où se formaient des ingénieurs d’une autre espèce*”. Récanati describes the school as “a closed world whose only environment and food were the thick placenta in which we were swimming”.⁴⁴ In this “placenta” the students listened to lectures, studied “studious explanations of texts: speeches by party leaders, *communiqués* of the Politbureau, editorials of *L'Humanité*, and above all, *The History of the CP(B) of the USSR*, the fundamental manual.”⁴⁵

Récanati describes going to Central School as “a great honour, since one had been chosen at the end of an unfathomable but vigorous selection process ... we knew that being chosen as a student was a mark of what elsewhere would have been called advancement...”⁴⁶ The authority and hierarchy of the Party were drummed into the students right from the beginning: their study brochures contained pictures of the members of the Politbureau shown in order of importance. The first one was of course Maurice Thorez, followed by Jacques Duclos and André Marty. These were the party leaders, the “ideal cadres”, who had blazed a path that others would follow. They were the representation of the “perfect Communist” of a special mould described in Chapter 2: the inspiring and essential element in the everyday lives of all cadres, the model to be emulated by the cadre school trainees. Récanati felt in awe of these “*têtes solennelles, vivant Panthéon, dont je tenais à m’imprégner*”; he was convinced that “these comrades really were a superior species”. The students tried to “measure up to their given task, to become more *savants*, to better master the science of Marxism-Leninism, to become, above all, better Communists”. However, in the end, knowledge seemed to matter less than “a certain way of being ... and for this, the comrades from working-class origin seemed to be predisposed by nature whereas the others, who had not been so ‘fortunate’, had to strive hard to achieve this.” An example of this was the school’s deputy director Caïman who came from a working-class family in Pas-de-Calais (both his father and grandfather were miners - “*l’aristocratie la plus*

authentique", as Récanati puts it). To his eternal shame, Caïman had been "educated out of his class" to become an *instituteur*: "*Il en était accablé, il vivait sa mutation sociale comme une mésalliance qui avait gâché son lignage.*"⁴⁷

Years later, Récanati came to examine his experience at the central school. For him, the schools consolidated the *esprit de parti*; not so much because "the militants there learned things but because of the general climate of the establishment". The training period required both humility and obstinacy: the students had to be aware of the class struggle not only in its "visible form" (work v. capital, the socialist camp v. the imperialist camp, etc.) but also - and perhaps even more importantly - in its "malign and less visible form, that is to say, the 'inner' class struggle." The good Communist had to know that the "bourgeois evil exists in all of us and must be detected and weeded out; one had to be 'pure' in order to be worthy of participating in 'communion'". The idea of 'inner' struggle thus became a vital instrument of control in the psychological transformation of the person into a *Communist* person, in particular in the case of students from an intellectual background. Every deviance from the party could be depicted as "bourgeois" tendencies within the 'self', as unworthiness or weakness and therefore, a source of immense personal guilt. In Chapter 2 we established that one of the functions of the cadre schools was indeed to "eradicate every vestige of non-communist beliefs and to replace them with Marxist-Leninist ideology". It is therefore hardly surprising that Récanati should compare his school experience to his (later) psychoanalysis: "I noticed in the course of my psychoanalysis that I had 'studied' at my desk at the School as I had spoken on the couch." In his mind there was no doubt: "This School works on people's souls as much and even more than on their brains."⁴⁸

Learning in Moscow

The next stage after the central school for some students was the International Cadre School in Moscow, which had been reopened as the Institute of Social Sciences. This was the case for Guy Poussy⁴⁹ who participated in the first six-month course of the Institute from August 1962 to April 1963. The French group which was sent to Moscow consisted of ten students, of whom eight stayed six months and two completed a year's

course.⁵⁰ The group included two women⁵¹, the average age of the French students was 30-35 years, and they were all party functionaries from at least the federation level. They were mostly of working-class origin.

The CPSU informed the various CPs how many students of different nationalities could be received in Moscow as “there had to be a suitable mixture” from parties in Western Europe, the Third World and elsewhere. Before leaving for Moscow, the French students were told by the PCF that they “were representing French communists and that they should remain, first and foremost, French communists in the USSR”. The students' expenses were met by the Soviet party and they received a grant of 180 roubles per month (the equivalent of a wage earned by a highly qualified Soviet worker⁵²) to include their expenses in Moscow.

Born in 1933, Guy Poussy had joined both the CGT and the PCF in 1951. He had trained as a metal turner (*CAP de tourneur*) and at the time of leaving for Moscow, was the organisational secretary of the Val-de-Marne federation and had already completed the elementary and federal school levels as well as the one-month central school. Now he had the choice of further study in Paris or Moscow: “*Mon seul diplôme, c'était le CAP, j'avais 29 ans, alors [...] d'aller à Moscou, à l'université, c'était présenté un peu comme ça - université, école internationale - ça, ne se refusait pas, quoi!*” In accordance with the stringent selection procedures (see Chapter 2), the decision to send Poussy to the International Cadre School was made by the PCF's Central Committee and ratified by the CPSU. According to Poussy, those selected for training in Moscow had to have considerable experience of high-level militant activity and also a “certain maturity as regards the USSR” in order to understand the “reality of the Soviet Union”: “*Tout frais émoulu, on envoyait quelqu'un, on aurait été déçu.*” Poussy had passed this test and was trusted to accept the Soviet reality for what it was and to remain “maturely” faithful to the Party.

The students lived in an *internat* with a huge library, sports centre, cinema, billiard room, and other facilities which emphasised their privileged, if isolated, status; as Poussy put it, “*Je ne crois pas que les étudiants russes avaient les mêmes conditions de*

travail que nous!" The students were issued with a Soviet identity card that enabled them to travel within the area and "*vivre une vie de Moscovite*". The only obstacle was the Russian language, which the students could learn in addition to their compulsory subjects (which were taught in French or interpreted simultaneously).

Subjects taught included the history of the international labour movement, the teaching of which did not necessarily find an echo with the French students who questioned the "unique" role of the CPSU in the way that this theme was developed ("*on était, quand même, un peu contestataires!*"). In addition, the history of the CPSU was an important part of the curriculum as were Marxist political economy and philosophy. Practical work and seminars featured on the programme, with a test every month.

Classes started at 9 a.m. and continued throughout the day with short pauses and a meal break. They included debates during which the Soviet teachers also wanted to know about France and the French party. The teachers were all university lecturers, and spoke excellent French (although lessons were often interpreted). Teacher-student relations were "good" and although the Russian teachers were discouraged from associating with their French students outside school hours, some of them (the labour movement lecturer Efinova in particular) did in fact socialise a great deal and accompanied the French on their outings and helped them with their everyday problems.

At the end of the school, there was a *stage pratique* which consisted of a two-week fact-finding tour somewhere in the Soviet Union. Poussy's group chose to go the Uzbekistan where they visited state companies, collective farms and sites of historical importance and met local party representatives. They concluded their six-month course by taking a fortnight's holiday in Leningrad in a party-run hotel.

Guy Poussy had mainly positive memories about his experience: "*Moi, j'en ai gardé un très bon souvenir, une très bonne expérience, pour tout prendre. Et les Soviétiques, et le régime, le système. Les Soviétiques étaient charmants!*" Poussy, of course, had the advantage of being in the USSR during Khrushchev's era. The French students felt that the "country was coming out of Stalinism" and that "things were moving". And yet, they

also noticed a great many “*blocages*” compared with their life in France and the functioning of the PCF: “ *A l’époque, on disait, ça c’est soviétique, nous, on est Français.* ” “*Figé*” is the expression used by Poussy as too much reference was made to the past and not enough consideration was given to the changes and developments in the world or in the USSR. Khrushchev and his imperious ways were criticised by all at the cadre school: “ *[...] parmi les intellectuels, les professeurs, les étudiants, parce que Khrouchtchev était sans style, ne plaisait pas du tout, il prenait pour un Russe un paysan* ”. Poussy also criticised the Soviets’ “irritating” habit of having an answer to everything: “ *C’était ce qui était insupportable! Ils ne se trompaient jamais, ils étaient sûrs d’eux, ils avaient une réponse à tout!* ” In fact, the French group felt almost claustrophobic at times; according to Poussy, the saving grace during the long course was their contact with Paris as the PCF’s Central Committee members who came to give lectures brought news from home which enabled the French to keep up-to-date with events in France. And of course, “ *on avait L’Huma! C’était la meilleure correspondance, on avait un peu de décalage, mais heureusement, il y avait L’Huma!* ”

Despite Poussy’s insistence on the “relative” lack of restrictions on the foreign students, it is clear that the physical conditions at the school were designed to isolate the students from the rest of the Soviet society. The school had created its own closed community in which the students were under constant and direct supervision. Virtually every moment of their day - including periods of “relaxation” - was organised, observed and scrutinised by their Soviet hosts. As in the 1930s, the schooling period served a dual function of inculcating theory and assessing the communist personality: many activities were consciously organised to achieve conditions in which students were artificially “tested” as to the level of their commitment and reliability (cf. study excursions and holidays - see also Chapter 3).

“L’année 1956 va s’ouvrir, pleine de promesses”⁵³

Stalin died in March 1953, and the PCF was inconsolable. *APPRENDRE* (see APPENDIX. 4, p. 236) devoted a special issue to “*le chef, l’ami, le frère de tous les travailleurs du monde*”. However, by 1955 the education bulletin was eagerly awaiting

the start of yet another study year: "*L'année 1956 va s'ouvrir, pleine de promesses...*"

Despite these hopes, more upsets were on their way.

The external developments of 1956 are well known and there is no need to repeat them. What concerns us here is the response of the PCF's political education system to the bombshell of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and Khrushchev's secret report in February 1956, and to the process of destalinisation which had begun at a moderate pace after Stalin's death in March 1953.

The traumatised PCF never issued any ringing condemnation of Stalin, but certain qualified admissions could be perceived in the teaching programmes. Thus, the May 1956 issue of *Cahiers du communisme* published extracts of a speech by Thorez which was given at the end of a special training course of communist deputies.⁵⁴ In his speech Thorez repudiated the cult of personality and admitted that the cult had diminished the role of the Party and the masses, ruined the principle of collective leadership and harmed any development of criticism and self-criticism. But he made it clear that the CPSU's 20th Congress "did not constitute ... in any way a weakening or a denial of our principles; on the contrary, it was a more rigorous affirmation of these principles which exhorts us to reinforce our ideological work." Although the cult of personality was criticised, Stalin himself was not: "*Eh bien, non!* The policy was correct. The mistakes he made change nothing about the fact that Stalin fought, with the Central Committee, against the Trotskyists, who would have led the Soviet Union to its destruction had they triumphed."

In October 1956 Thorez delivered a lecture, "*L'enseignement du marxisme-léninisme dans les écoles du Parti*";⁵⁵ to the teachers of the Central School. In his lecture Thorez outlined the teaching programmes and themes for the new academic year 1956-57. They were: socialism had become a world system and one third of the world's population now lived in socialist countries; war was no longer inevitable thanks to the philosophy of peaceful coexistence; the pauperisation of the working class in capitalist regimes was gathering pace; there were various forms of transition to socialism; and, the need for the unity of working class, i.e. socialist and communist co-operation. These themes were

fully accepted by the PCF as they corresponded to the Party's own ideas; indeed, the Party considered itself as the forerunner of Khrushchev's views.

Perhaps the most notable point concerned the teaching of history in the party schools. "In order to study the contemporary history (from 1917 onward)," said Thorez, "the Party had, until now, relied mainly on the *Précis d'histoire du Parti bolchévik*." "But," he continued, "although this work remains an important document to which we will always have to refer, certain theses that it puts forward need to be treated with caution. On the other hand, although we must not neglect in any way the international experience, in particular the experience of the glorious Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the October Revolution, the fact remains that for us, the essential thing is the history of the French labour movement. The decision of the 14th Congress to prepare a work concerning the history of our Party has come at the right moment. As from now, it is around this history that we must organise the study of the contemporary period."⁵⁶

Thus, to underline the fact that the history of the working-class movement and Marxism in France predated the foundation of the PCF in 1920, earlier events such as the Revolution, the silkworkers' insurrection in Lyons in 1831, June 1848, the Paris Commune and the formation of the *Parti ouvrier français* were added to the teaching programme in an attempt to make a clear break from overt Stalinism at a sensitive time.

The person who had to deal with the practical side of the changes was Marcel Rosette, who had just taken up the post of the Central School director in January 1956:

"Moi, j'avais ce problème: tout l'enseignement, jusqu'au XXe Congrès, c'était du Staline, les oeuvres de Staline, et les oeuvres choisies de Lénine un petit peu, deux tomes seulement. Staline, Staline, Staline - toute la lecture, c'était Staline! Moi, j'ai encore l'Histoire du PCUS - et c'est tout souligné, il y a du rouge et du bleu partout! Eh bien, arrive le 20e Congrès, là, on est passé à Lénine. Moi, j'ai lu - j'étais bien obligé de lire jour et nuit! - les 34 tomes de Lénine - eh oui! Il fallait reconstruire complètement l'enseignement. Par exemple, je ne me rappelle plus avec précision mais il y avait un cours sur la nation - Staline avait dit que la Nation a ces cinq caractéristiques, une, deux, trois, quatre, cinq. Alors, après 1956, ce n'était plus ça! Ce n'était plus possible. Alors, j'ai trouvé chez Lénine - ce qui n'est pas étonnant - des remarques sur la Nation qui étaient, d'ailleurs, beaucoup plus dialectiques. Alors, je m'en suis servi pour bâtir un nouveau cours sur

*la Nation! Et il a fallu, non seulement pour moi, mais pour tous les professeurs, qu'ils en aient été conduits à complètement modifier l'enseignement, le contenu, etc. Moi, j'y ai mis souvent du Maurice Thorez aussi. Pas brutalement, mais petit à petit."*⁵⁷

Claude Poperen confirms the change: "Yes, something did change: there was no more Stalin. There was a certain amount of distance-taking - undeniably! In the one-month central school in 1954 we had studied the *History of the CPSU(B)*, but when I did the four-month school in 1959-60, it was no longer studied. It was a very noticeable change - it was very obvious." Regarding Marcel Rosette's description of the changes taking place progressively, Claude Poperen remarked: "Yes, progressively, yes! It was so progressive in relation to the 20th Congress that it took us 20 years to admit the existence of the Khrushchev Report!"⁵⁸

Thus, progressively, cautious programmatic changes trickled through the system. In 1957, the elementary school *Cours 2*, "*La construction du socialisme en URSS*" set out the new ideas and mildly criticised Stalin: "In the struggle against the class enemy and for the construction of socialism, Stalin acquired a huge authority within the nation. The great successes were attributed to him exclusively whereas they were the work of the Soviet peoples and the entire Party. At its 20th Congress the CPSU courageously put forward the question of correcting the errors which were the result of the personality cult." This clearly meant that as an old party line had become untenable, another one was to be substituted and conveyed to the students within the curriculum. If errors had been made, the "system" was not to blame and was in fact able to take corrective action within the *existing* framework without the need for any profound organisational changes.

The recommended reading list included nothing by Stalin: The Communist Manifesto, Lenin (State and Revolution), Khrushchev's Report (Part 2), *Fils du Peuple*, and the Soviet Constitution were required reading. Furthermore, all the available material indicates that Stalin was slowly pushed out and there was a distinct decline in the quantity of praise allocated to him in the education programmes. Philippe Robrieux also points out that up to 1956, the *bios* of party militants had to state which of Stalin's works they had read; this question disappeared after the 20th Congress of the CPSU.⁵⁹

“Changements à petits pas”

The 15th Congress in 1959 saw some important leadership changes: Waldeck Rochet was promoted to the secretariat, Georges Marchais elected to the Politbureau and Roland Leroy to the Central Committee. One of the objectives of the Congress was the struggle against *“le pouvoir personnel et toutes ses conséquences”* and the draft programme advocated *“la restauration et renovation de la démocratie”*⁶⁰ which was to be achieved by an alliance between the working class and other social categories. The Congress also discussed a tentative idea of a common government programme of the left. These strategies were included in the political education programmes for the early 1960s and taught across all levels.⁶¹ The prescribed study material defined the meaning of the “Nation”, the national role of the working class and, in accordance with the Congress objectives, promoted the strategy of the unity of working class and its alliance with the *couches moyennes* in order to achieve the stated goals.⁶² Also outlined were the “new possibilities for preventing wars” which were the result of the success of the *“forces du socialisme et de la paix”*.⁶³ As prescribed by the leadership to reinforce communist unity after the upheaval in 1956, the education programme focused on the PCF's own history, Marxist-Leninist ideology, strategy and policies (cadre training, party unity and structure). Only “unwavering party spirit” could overcome all difficulties and problems: *“Aussi, le devoir permanent de chaque membre du Parti est-il d'élever en lui-même et chez ses camarades l'esprit de Parti.”* Recommended reading consisted of the 15th Congress documents, reports and speeches, Khrushchev's Reports to the CPSU's 20th and 21st Congresses, Lenin, Thorez, still one or two works by Stalin, Marx, and various party publications.⁶⁴

In the aftermath of the Khrushchev report it was also necessary to increase the number of schools and that of “theoretically qualified” instructors who could link the Marxist-Leninist theory to the present political situation. *“Les journées d'étude sur le travail d'éducation”* took place in October 1960 at Choisy-le-Roi and as a result, 30 federations organised 40 courses for almost 500 trainee instructors in the period September 1960 - September 1961. The aim of these short courses was to generally raise the theoretical level of the instructors, to train them in teaching methods (how to use the

brochures, how to direct the school, etc.), and to supervise the preparation of teaching materials.⁶⁵

From the organisational point of view, the education sector claimed improved results for the year 1960-61 at all three levels (500 elementary schools, 140 federal schools and “more central schools” with no exact numbers mentioned). The students were reported to be younger than before (average age in federal schools was around 25 years) and their social composition was “more varied”.⁶⁶

By the time of the 16th Congress in 1961, the necessity for left-wing unity now constituted the central theme and the old slogan, “*Ecarter tout ce qui divise, ne tenir compte que de ce qui unit*”, was taken up by Maurice Thorez.⁶⁷ Waldeck Rochet was appointed deputy secretary-general; this was the beginning of the slow aggiornamento, “*changements à petis pas*”. Although to critical observers many of the changes or reforms seemed only skin-deep they were, nevertheless, reflected in the ideological activity in which the Party engaged. A new body, the CERM (*Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes*) was set up;⁶⁸ profound debates between party philosophers and intellectuals took place; Aragon published his *Histoire de l'URSS*, a Khrushchevian version of Soviet history, in 1962; *La Nouvelle Critique* published a dossier on the cult of personality in 1963; Pierre Daix wrote the preface for Solzhenitsyn's “A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch”, and so on. Although much of this and of subsequent activity was clearly a case of recognising past mistakes in order to better present a positive image of the current situation in the USSR, it was also a small sign that the PCF was resigning itself, *bon gré, mal gré*, to the pursuit of destalinisation, albeit at its own pace and in its own fashion.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The cumulative impact of the harsh demands imposed on the PCF by the Zhdanov line in 1947 and the Party's subsequent systematic opposition to government, its unconditional attachment to the Soviet Union, its unashamed idolatry of Stalin and systematic eulogy of Soviet life, and its return to an “internationalist” and “classist”

stance caused a steady decline in membership as it dropped from an estimated high point of 800 000 in 1946 to around 250 000 in 1955.⁷⁰ Other factors also contributed to the decline: the communist *mystique* of the Resistance years was beginning to fade; France's economic development, "*les trente glorieuses*", was beginning to take off; and the PCF had no real prospects for returning to power in the Cold War situation.

Within the isolated PCF, the often feverish activities of the political education system therefore fulfilled many useful functions and its importance in propping up the communist movement during the early Cold War period is undeniable. First, the resurrected unified training system contributed to the maintenance of unity and cohesion of the rudderless Party in the absence of a real purpose and its leader. The "school experience" - especially the complete progress through all the stages in which the students came to invest more and more of their time, effort and life - moulded the students' sense of belonging, gave them a feeling of comradely solidarity - *seuls contre tous* - and undoubtedly strengthened their *esprit de parti*. Second, the carefully planned catechism-like teaching of the vital elements of theory and practice, and of current party themes, immediately provided the activists with ready-made solutions to the new situations which had arisen in the hostile world outside. At the same time, the system also maintained the status quo after the initial upheaval of inculcating a new doctrine. Third, the hectic education programme eliminated a considerable amount of "unproductive" leisure time which was replaced with structured study and party-related activities. Finally, the political education system constituted an effective mechanism for maintaining the leadership's authority - especially in conflictual circumstances - as well as teaching and preserving the values, institutions and practices of the Party. It can therefore be argued that the Party's ability to preserve the identity and cohesion of its vast organisation and to maintain the morale of the membership, whilst at the same time orchestrating multiple interest groups in the hostile political environment of the era, was partly due to the way in which the party education system formed such an integral part of party life and action.

As discussed in this present chapter, during most of the Fourth Republic the PCF remained in a political ghetto, marginalised and cut off from any participation in power

but enjoying the full support of the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. However, with the transformation of both the international and the domestic environment, strong pressures began to build up both to force and to facilitate a process of rethink and change in the Party. This was a complicated situation, as there were powerful influences within the PCF - namely the Thorezian leadership - advocating the status quo. Therefore, the adjustment to the new conditions was initially very slow: whilst the Party embraced with enthusiasm the theses of peaceful coexistence and the peaceful road to socialism, it was extremely cautious in responding to the demands for an internal liberalisation programme. The "Soviet connection" was another source of continual ideological and strategic tension as the PCF struggled to achieve a balance between its traditional international commitments and the domestic strategy necessitated by the budding alliance policy. The efforts made by the Party and its political education system to adjust to the new challenges presented by the period of Left Unity will be the subject of the next chapter.

Notes and references

1. This was Thorez's appeal to the miners at Waziers in July 1945. Reproduced in 'Cours no. 3: La politique communiste', *Ecole élémentaire du PCF*, édition janvier 1947, p. 9.
2. BRUNET, *op. cit.*, p. 87. A million copies of Thorez's speech were distributed; however, the speech remained a dead letter for more than a decade because of the imminent changes in the Soviet foreign policy and developments in French domestic issues.
3. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome II, op. cit.*, p. 53 and pp. 77-8.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 126 and p. 128. See also WALL, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
5. The myth of the Communist martyrs became an essential part the PCF's political training programme and their fate and that of "*les 75 000 autres membres du Parti des Fusillés*" (an expression coined by the writer Elsa Triolet in a wartime story; see ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 114, note 5) was narrated in the training brochures and pamphlets: "*Au surplus, c'est le Parti communiste et ses militants qui ont fait les sacrifices les plus grands dans la lutte pour la libération nationale, ce qui a valu au Parti communiste le glorieux titre de PARTI DES FUSILLÉS.*" (Cours no. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 5.)
6. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome II, op. cit.*, p. 29.
7. FAJON, E., 'La lutte idéologique, tâche permanente du Parti', *Cahiers du communisme*, octobre 1947, p. 981.
8. Information supplied by the historian Jean Charles (Besançon) whose father Robert Charles regularly crossed the Swiss border for this purpose, and by Etienne Fajon (interview 13.9.1991).
9. Interview with Etienne Fajon 13.9.1991.

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10. Interview with Marcel Rosette 9.9.1991.
 11. *Du Congrès de Paris au Congrès de Strasbourg: Rapports du Comité central pour le XIe Congrès national du PCF.*, (1947), pp. 345-46. (Kindly lent by Marcel Rosette.)
 12. Ibid., pp. 383-92.
 13. BRAYANCE, A., *Anatomie du Parti communiste français*. (Paris, éd. Denrel, 1952), pp. 195-96.
 14. Ibid., p.198.
 15. Ibid., pp. 200-202.
 16. Thus, Victor Joannès, the director of a one-month central school organised for trade union activists in July-August 1947, wrote detailed reports on all 23 students on the course. Here are the reports on Robert Charles from Doubs (see note 8) and the only woman on the course, Amande Martin.

“CHARLES, Robert. 34 ans, horloger, certificat d'Études primaires, membre du Parti depuis 1932, aux J.C. en 1930. Secrétaire de l'Union locale de Marteau. A éprouvé au départ d'assez sérieuses difficultés. Durant la première semaine a beaucoup peiné, se trouvant un peu désespéré par la nouveauté des problèmes. A fait de gros efforts pour comprendre et se perfectionner. Il y est à mon avis parvenu, se classant même parmi les bons éléments de cette école. Ne me semble pas craindre la critique et savoir reconnaître ses insuffisances. Il aura encore besoin de clarifier ses idées mais doit rendre de grands services aux postes qu'il occupe. A suivre.”

“MARTIN, Amande. 26 ans, bonnetière, niveau du brevet élémentaire. Au Parti en 1946. Au secrétariat de l'U.D. et au Comité fédéral du Parti dans le Gard. Jeune militante venue des milieux protestants, croyante et pratiquante convaincue. A mon avis c'était une erreur de l'envoyer dans une école alors qu'elle n'a qu'une idée très confuse de la doctrine du Parti. Elle a cependant travaillé avec application et sérieux, mais ne parvenant pas toujours à réaliser clairement les problèmes posés. Je crois qu'elle a appris beaucoup et qu'elle pourra, bien aidée par la direction de la Fédération, réaliser mieux. D'intelligence moyenne, très sensible, assez sentimentale; tenir compte de ses sentiments religieux dans la discussion avec elle. A suivre.” (Ecole centrale de cadres du Parti militant dans le mouvement syndical, 4.9.1947. Notes et observations générales. Archives Marty, Carton F-G, Dossier 8. CRHMSS, Université de Paris.)
 17. Ibid.
 18. *Brochures et ouvrages recommandés aux militants du Parti*, 18.6.1946. (Archives Marty, Carton F-G, Dossier 11. CRHMSS, Université de Paris.)
 19. APPRENDRE, août 1947, no. 9, p. 29. The last two were originally Soviet films, “véritables chefs-d'oeuvre” of the Soviet cinema and highly recommended.
 20. Ibid.
 21. APPRENDRE, décembre 1946, no. 6, pp. 7-12.
 22. See TIERSKY, *French Communism 1920-1974*, op. cit., pp. 156-57, and JOHNSON, R.W., op. cit., p. 81.
 23. In September 1947, a conference of nine European CPs took place in Poland (the PCF and PCI were the only Western CPs) in which the international communist movement accepted a new view, first expressed by the Soviet delegate Zhdanov, that the world was now split into two hostile blocs, the “camp of imperialism” led by the USA and the “camp of socialism and peace” headed by the Soviet Union. The Cominform was to be less rigid than the old Comintern and less direct than control by the CPSU which had replaced the Comintern after its dissolution in 1943. The PCF's role under the Cominform was to adapt its major policies in accordance with the instructions from

- the Cominform's collective institutions in which the French Communists participated and played an important role heading organisations such as the World Syndicalist Federation, The World Federation of Democratic Youth, International Democratic Federation of Women, The World Council for Peace, the International Association of Democratic Jurists, and the Journalists' organisation. See KRIEGEL, A., *The Communist movement and the French political system*, in BLACKMER, D. & KRIEGEL, A. *The International Role of the Communist Parties of Italy and France*. (Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1975), p. 45.
24. DOMENACH, J-M., 'The French Communist Party', in *Communism in Western Europe*. (Archion Books, 1971.), p. 129.
 25. Ibid., pp. 130-31.
 26. ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 152, and TIERSKY, *French Communism 1920-1974, op. cit.*, p. 220.
 27. An open letter to President Truman was signed by millions of French; there were demonstrations against the arrival of General Bradley in Paris to take up his post as the supreme NATO commander and a vigorous campaign against "*la sale guerre*" in Vietnam, and later, support for Algerian independence; millions of people signed the "Peace Ballot", the Stockholm Peace Appeal in 1950 and the Berlin Appeal. According to Marcel Rosette, the peace campaigns gave the PCF a great deal of credibility and a new sense of purpose: "*Il y avait 5 millions de voix communistes, les communistes ont été très actifs pour recueillir des signatures pour l'appel - on en a recueilli en France 14 million! Près de trois fois le nombre d'électeurs communistes! Pendant des mois, on allait taper dans les escaliers ... moi, j'étais à la campagne pour les paysans ... on allait signer pour la paix, pour l'appel de Stockholm!*" (Interview with Marcel Rosette, 9.9.1991.) All in all, 500 million signatures were collected around the world for the Stockholm appeal.
 28. DOMENACH, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-34.
 29. See DREYFUS, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
 30. See WALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-40, and also pp. 115-131 for the "counter-community" phenomenon. The classic works on this theme are KRIEGEL's *The French Communists, op. cit.*, and LAVAU, *A quoi sert le PCF?, op. cit.* According to JOHNSON, seeking refuge in a tight-knit association of brethren is a familiar theme for sociologists of religion who have studied the behavioural characteristics of militant sects under threat. The symptoms are "an exaggerated piety and devotionism which often bespeaks an impulse towards quietist retreat from the harsh world outside where the blows rain in; a strange coexistence of such sentiments with a sense of militant resistance and out-and-out defiance; millenarian longings attached to distant figures; a sublime assertion of confidence in the future salvation they will bring; and an urge to combine all these elements within absolute certainties and huddled security of all-protective (because self-encapsulating) association, Church - or Party". Johnson argues that the PCF, in 1947, fulfilled all criteria of a "suffering church militant": there was persecution, martyrs, devils, saints as well as the holy faith, Stalinism. The crucial thing was that Stalinism was systematically and powerfully pumped into everyday party life at this time to the point that it became the Party's religion and its most important ideological guide. In France, the cult of Thorez became an essential extension of Stalinism as it was used to inject charisma into an increasingly bureaucratic and lifeless party machine. (JOHNSON, *The French Communist Party versus the Students, op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.)
 31. 'Cours 6, Le Parti communiste', *Ecole élémentaire*, janvier 1955, p. 26.
 32. Interview with Claude Poperen 1.4.1992.
 33. KRIEGEL, A., *Ce que j'ai cru comprendre*. (R. Laffont, 1991), p. 475.
 34. PUDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
 35. *APPRENDRE*, septembre 1951, no. 12, p. 2, and *APPRENDRE*, novembre 1951, no. 13, pp. 3-4.

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36. *APPRENDRE*, novembre 1951, no. 13, pp. 10-13.
 37. *APPRENDRE*, février-mars 1952, no. 16, p. 2.
 38. KRIEGEL, *Ce que j'ai cru comprendre*, op. cit., p. 569.
 39. Ibid.
 40. *APPRENDRE*, février-mars 1953, no. 22, pp. 25-7.
 41. Information from personal notes kindly lent by A. Vagneron, Besançon.
 42. Interview with Marcel Rosette, 9.9.1991.
 43. RÉCANATI, op. cit., p. 8.
 44. Ibid., p. 174.
 45. Roger Pannequin, the Central School director in 1952-53, called this work "... *ce pavé indigeste, traduit du russe, qui ressassait des formules creuses à longueur de chapitres*"; see PANNEQUIN, op. cit., p. 292.
 46. RÉCANATI, op. cit., p. 13.
 47. Ibid., p. 175. Récanati's description of the "inferiority complex" from which the intellectuals suffered when faced with *véritables ouvriers* is confirmed by Roger Pannequin: in the PCF, the intellectuals "*vivaient dans une perpétuelle attente de la bonne parole prolétarienne.*" (See PANNEQUIN, op. cit., p. 292.) Similar remarks are made by Philippe Robrieux, who felt bitter at not having been chosen to go to the Central School: "*Comme je n'étais pas un militant d'origine ouvrière ou populaire peut-être, pour cette raison, je ne devais jamais être retenu pour suivre l'école centrale. À ce moment-là, cela me navra.*" See ROBRIEUX, P., *Notre génération communiste*. (Laffont, 1977), pp. 75-6. Claude Poperen also confirms the unwritten rule: "*Les origines ouvrières étaient très importantes - même déterminantes. Intellectuels - au-delà d'un instituteur, peu de chances d'accès. Si ce n'était pas, de temps en temps, un peu pour un potiche sur la cheminée ... il fallait bien un intellectuel, mais c'était vraiment le critère ouvrier.*" (Interview with Claude Poperen 1.4.1992.)
 48. Ibid., pp. 175-76.
 49. Interview with Guy Poussy 9.7.1992. At the time of the interview, Poussy was a member of the PCF's Central Committee and Mayor of Champigny.
 50. Ibid. The two were René Piquet, a MEP and Central Committee and former BP member in 1992, and Jacques Rimbault, deputy and mayor of Bourges at the time of the interview in 1992. Other PCF *responsables* who went to Moscow students included Central Committee members Anatole Allegret (1967-68), Charles Caressa (1964), Guy Fernandez (1965-66), Claude Llabres (1970-71), Robert Lakota (1960), and Jean Ooghe (1963-64). See MONTALDO, J., *La France communiste* (Albin Michel, Paris, 1977), p. 32. The PCF's presidential candidate André Lajoinie was also a Moscow student in the early 1970s (Interview with Charles Fiterman, 30.3.1992) but he refused to participate in an interview.
 51. Ibid. One was Colette Coulon, deputy mayor and councillor at Seine-Saint-Denis in 1992, a CC member and in charge of the women's section together with Madeleine Vincent.
 52. Ibid.
 53. *APPRENDRE*, no. 34, décembre 1955.
 54. THOREZ, M., 'Quelques aspects des problèmes de la propaganda et du travail idéologique', *Cahiers du communisme*, no. 5, mai 1956, pp. 636-37 (emphasis added).

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55. THOREZ, M., 'L'enseignement du marxisme-léninisme dans les écoles du Parti', *Cahiers du communisme*, no. 11, novembre 1956, pp. 1202-207.
 56. Ibid., pp. 1211-212 (emphasis added).
 57. Interview with Marcel Rosette 9.9.1991.
 58. Interview with Claude Poperen 1.4.1992.
 59. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome II, op. cit.*, p. 401, note 92.
 60. *Cahiers du communisme*, no. 10, octobre 1959, p. 961.
 61. *Ecole élémentaire du PCF (1959)*, Archives of the PCF, 2 place du Colonel-Fabien.
 62. Ibid. *Cours 2: La nation et le rôle national de la classe ouvrière*.
 63. Ibid. *Cours 4: La lutte pour la paix*.
 64. Source: Elementary School brochures 1959, Archives of the PCF, 2 place du Colonel-Fabien, Paris.
 65. *Cahiers du communisme*, novembre 1961, pp. 1174-80.
 66. *Cahiers du communisme*, janvier 1962, pp. 39-40.
 67. ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
 68. The CERM later became the IMT, *Institut Maurice Thorez*, inaugurated on what would have been Thorez' 67th birthday. See ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome IV, op. cit.*, p. 796.
 69. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 328. These "outbursts" are considered by Courtois and Lazar as tactical choices at a time when it was necessary to convince the domestic audience that a certain amount of distance was now taken from certain aspects of Soviet reality - without causing too much damage to the special relationship.
 70. TIERSKY, *French Communism 1920-1974, op. cit.*, p. 182. BRUNET estimates the membership at only 180000 in 1953 (see BRUNET, *op. cit.*, p. 93).

CHAPTER 5

LOVE THY BROTHER (1965-80)

The present chapter focuses on the development of the party education system during the animated and challenging period of left unity. We shall first examine the functioning of the training system in the 1960s, as described by the then directors of the central school. The training programmes will be analysed in the context of three main themes of the era, i.e. the shifts in relations between the PCF and the PS; the role of the working class in the PCF and the Party's specific identity as *the* Party of the working class; and the effects of the changes engendered on the relations between the French and Soviet parties by left unity. Students' own accounts of their "school experience" will provide more first-hand information about life in party schools. This information will be further supplemented by an investigation of the previously untapped archives of the Party's central school (*Ecole nationale*), which will enable us to furnish more accurate details concerning the sociological composition of the student population during the 1974-80 period.

Although there were cautious modifications (see Chapter 4) in party thinking in the wake of 1956, no significant changes appeared in the communist strategy until well after Maurice Thorez' retirement as the secretary general at the 17th Congress in May 1964.¹ With Waldeck Rochet becoming the new secretary-general, a fundamental ideological change concerning the transition to socialism was introduced. Not only was the transition to be peaceful, but the idea that "only one party could lead the way to socialism" was abandoned. New party rules were introduced by Marchais (who now officially rose to the post of secretary of party organisation) with the intention of improving internal democracy and organisation of party cells. The Central Committee included 20 new members; this also, to a certain extent, seemed to mark the end of an era. The main watchwords were "*ACTION, UNION, COMBAT*" as the alliance with the Socialists as a central plank in the communist strategy was reinforced. The study programmes were redesigned to correspond to the Congress Resolution but changes were superficial and cosmetic, in keeping with the cautious approach of the Party.

In the early days of the *aggiornamento* it was crucial to maintain a significant element of the old status quo in order to preserve the identity and cohesion of the Party which had taken a serious battering in 1956. To a large degree, this stability was provided by the rigid structure of the party schools which continued to be run on the well-proven lines established in the 1940s and 1950s. This is confirmed by the extensive interviews² with Nicholas Pasquarelli, who was the director of the PCF's central schools in 1962-66 after taking over from Marcel Rosette (see Chapter 4), and Charles Fiterman, Pasquarelli's deputy. Both were experienced party men who had risen to their present positions through the PCF's training establishments. Pasquarelli's path to the top post at the Central School was typical: working-class origins (*ouvrier professionnel qualifié, fraiseur-ajusteur* in a metallurgical factory, both parents workers), trade union member (*CGT-Métallurgie*) and party member since 1953. In 1955, Pasquarelli was a member of the federal committee, then of the federal bureau, and from 1956 he was leading the *Jeunesse Communiste* at departmental level in Isère at which point he was asked to "do the schools". Fiterman was the son of a Jewish working-class family of Eastern European origin, had trained as an electrician and joined the PCF in 1951, rising to the Central Committee in 1972 and the Politbureau in 1976.

Early *aggiornamento* at the central school

Most advanced students remained within the PCF's own training system and attended the Party's one and four-month central schools. The central school in the 1960s was situated at Choisy-le-Roi near Paris in a house that had belonged to Maurice Thorez. In 1962 the premises were extended to accommodate 120 students on one-month and four-month courses. The school also organised shorter political training courses for specific target audiences (women, youth, trade unionists, etc.).

Teachers at the central school still consisted mainly of people from working-class origins rather than trained teachers, and they were usually members of the Central Committee or the Politbureau. Towards the end of Pasquarelli's directorship, when the emphasis shifted towards the teaching of philosophy, more "specialised" teachers were

called upon (for example, Roger Garaudy taught in the central school while he was a member of the Politbureau). The initial choice of teachers rested with the director, who also drew up a teaching programme based on the current party line and presented it to the Education Commission of the Central Committee for approval. The director then contacted suitable people to teach the courses (see APPENDICES 5 and 6, p. 237-238). Each teacher then submitted an outline of the proposed lecture or lesson which, once approved by the Education Commission, had to be adhered to. According to Pasquarelli, teachers who did not toe the line were "simply not asked again".

In the 1960s, most students still lacked all formal education, and had only political and trade union experience. True to form (see Chapters 3 and 4), their lack of education was more than compensated by their "thirst to learn"; as Pasquarelli put it, they were "*des gens énormément à l'écoute qui travaillaient beaucoup*". They were of all ages, from members of the *Jeunesse communiste* to middle-aged militants. Women were in a minority and represented only about 25% or less of all central school students. Because of the commitment of time involved, the four-month schools in particular had few women although Pasquarelli claims that the situation improved by the end of his term of office.

No exact student numbers were available but according to Pasquarelli, there were between 20 and 80 students on the four-month course. The maximum number was 120 which included the one-month school, the four-month school and various targeted training courses. Students were selected by federations which proposed "promising" militants to the Central Committee; the latter usually accepted the candidates without problem (see APPENDIX 7, p. 239, for *Résumé d'activité du militant* which had to be completed by the potential students). This was unsurprising as "people who came to central school had already understood, for the main part, the party line - they already had responsibilities in the Party". The majority of students were of working-class origin but there were also a few managers, teachers, elected representatives, trade unionists, etc. Most already had responsibilities at a fairly high level in the Party (some were even members of the Central Committee and Politbureau). Among Pasquarelli's students were the future Paris federation leaders Henri Fiszbin and Mireille Bertrand; in fact,

Pasquarelli estimates that of the 1991 Politbureau members about 25% had been “trained” by him.³

Given that the aim was to train communist militants, the theoretical aspects of history (of the labour movement, the CPSU and the PCF in particular, and history of France in terms of the PCF, etc.), scientific socialism (strategy, tactics, party organisation, etc.), philosophy, and political economy were indispensable for providing a “scientific” understanding of the evolution of French society.⁴ In keeping with previous traditions, students were taught general culture (music, art, literature) and were prescribed background reading which consisted of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and text books originating from the USSR.

Daily timetables were intensive and rigidly structured. A typical lecture would last from two to four hours and the students would have already done a considerable amount of reading to prepare for it. A lecture was always followed by a discussion, usually led by the director of the school. At the end of the school, a general balance sheet was drawn up in which the students were asked to evaluate their learning experience. The director also prepared his own report and included an assessment of each student.⁵

Towards the the latter part of Pasquarelli's directorship there was a shift away from the immobilism of the Thorez era and Soviet-style texts: for example, Nikitin's book on political economics was abandoned and replaced with more Marx. The teaching of State Monopoly Capitalism was mainly based on the PCF's own material, which, in Pasquarelli's opinion, in itself represented a major modification. This clearly corresponded to the changes in the Party's ideological activity after Waldeck Rochet's appointment as secretary general. Yet, although “advanced democracy” and the future Common Programme were the main topics of debate, Pasquarelli felt that it was true to say that “*pour l'essentiel on restait encore un peu prisonnier, théoriquement, de tout ce qui était de l'URSS*”.

Control and the nurturing of the communist community was, as in Moscow, furthered by dominance of student leisure activities, including trips to places connected with the

history of *La Commune* and to Versailles in order to liven up the history lessons. The cultural aspect introduced by Etienne Fajon in the 1930s (see Chapter 3) was now firmly entrenched in the study programme with visits to museums, art galleries, concerts, the cinema and theatre.

In his report⁶ to the 18th Congress in 1967, Henri Martin revealed that during the decade following Khrushchev's secret report, the PCF's political education network had grown hugely: in 1957, there were 1000 students in 250 elementary schools as against 8078 in 985 schools in 1967 (24% of whom were new members); the federal schools figures for 1957 were 730 students in 57 schools; in 1967, this had risen to 1761 students in 157 schools. The central school figures were from 1961 and 1967, with 290 and 569 students respectively in the various central schools. As 42.1% of the party members in 1967 had joined after 1959 and 60-65% of the federal school students had been party members for less than three years, the schools were playing an essential role in introducing and updating the current party strategy and in steering the activists towards the Left Union.

Towards the Left Union

The Events of May 1968 as well as the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 forced the PCF to take stock of its role and strategies. The result was the Champigny Manifesto, "*Pour une démocratie avancée, pour une France socialiste*". The strategy in the Manifesto consisted of three main elements: left-wing joint action based on *démocratie avancée*, a nationalisation programme, and the PCF in the vanguard role as the party of the working class.⁷ The Manifesto also marked an important step towards a more realistic and open outlook, as it emphasised the Party's intention to include *les nouvelles couches sociales*, namely the white-collared, so-called new working class (*ITC: ingénieurs, techniciens et cadres*). This, of course, led to the perpetual ideological problem of preserving unity in diversity as the Party was forced to expand its base into different groups. Not surprisingly, the unifying function of the PCF's organisational principle of democratic centralism, became all the more important since commitment to common strategic objectives and shared ideological values and beliefs had to be

preserved and reinforced. Democratic centralism therefore remained intact, and the role of the political training system in supplying trained activists to apply it remained crucial.

In response to the new strategy requirements, the October 1968 (revised) study programme included a 29-page brochure, "*La marche de la France au socialisme*" which elucidated the ideas set out in the Manifesto.⁸ The brochure was divided into three main parts: "Why the struggle for democracy and socialism are inseparable"; "Why and how the peaceful passage to socialism is possible"; and "What the socialist society is like". The new strategy was pluralistic, more realistic and open, and preparing for a strong left-wing alliance (although one stated condition for the left unity was that the socialists had to "abandon their class-collaborationist policies and commit themselves to fighting together with the PCF to win political power"). Also updated was the theme dealing with *la lutte pour la paix*. Notable modifications and additions included a note on the Czech invasion⁹ and criticism of Mao Tse Tung for his "nationalistic warmongering and adventurist line". The PCF's main tasks in the struggle for peace were to put an end to the Vietnam War and to reinforce European security. Essential reading included Lenin, Thorez, the 18th Congress documents and various party publications including the Champigny Manifesto in its entirety. To circulate the ideas of the Manifesto to wider party audiences, the Secretariat of the Central Committee decided to organise a series of three lectures to explain and comment on the salient points of the party stance and strategy. Members of the Politbureau prepared these lectures, and a special lecture programme was planned for the political training of instructors at section level.¹⁰

Despite the very "eventful" political year, the Party still managed to put in a huge effort to expand its political education work. As a result, much progress was made in all areas: 18 500 participants at various education lectures; 8587 students in elementary schools, 1591 in federal schools, 3365 participants in 264 study circles and 474 trainee instructors on 22 teacher training courses.¹¹

The 17th Congress in 1970 was marked by a change of leadership with Georges Marchais becoming the de-facto leader of the Party because of Waldeck Rochet's illness,

and the run-up to the signing of the Common Programme in 1972. Marchais' rise to the top was marked by a mixture of "*ouverture et fermeture*".¹² "*Ouverture*" was reflected in Marchais' style of leadership: compared with the staid Waldeck Rochet, Marchais was presented as a dynamic leader, "*simple et franc*", popular with party militants and extremely combative in the media. "*Fermeture*", on the other hand, applied to ideological issues, the functioning of the party apparatus and the PCF-CPSU relations where the Party fell back on its old traditions. The Congress again confirmed the strategy of the left union and a common programme for a left-wing government. With these developments, there was the constant battle of having to reinforce and extend theoretical knowledge. "Our theoretical education work is linked to the Party's ideological struggle and it must therefore correspond entirely to the political objectives of the moment," wrote Marchais in May 1971.¹³ The congress themes therefore again formed the basis of the revised training programmes, i.e. the new stage in the State Monopoly Capitalism; advanced democracy as a stage towards socialism; unity of the working class and union of all popular forces; the ideological and organisational principles of the PCF; proletarian internationalism; national independence and international co-operation; and the struggle for peace.

In June 1971, Marchais published an important article in *L'Humanité*, "*La société française est en crise*", which was in fact the Party's analysis of French society at that time and remained so for years to come. The Party's theoretical work and teaching focused largely on this analysis of the crisis, and Jean Burlès, party theorist and central school director and teacher, further expanded the theme in his book "*Le PCF dans la société française*".¹⁴ Under Burlès' influence and as a response to May 1968, the teaching of philosophy - the essence of understanding that "*toutes les choses sont en mouvement*" - was improved and increased.

Henri Martin again gave a very detailed report¹⁵ to the 17th Congress concerning the state of the party education system in 1970 (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below). The Party had acquired 44 000 new members and as a consequence, student numbers at all levels had risen once more. At elementary level, there had been a 21.4% increase in the number of students (10 416 students) but even so it meant that only 25% of the new membership

had received basic political training. Federal school student numbers were up by 29.3% but attendance and organisation were unevenly spread between federations (Martin complained that 12 federations had not held a single school since 1960!). Central schools had been particularly busy during holiday periods and “double schools” had been run. Educational lectures (990) were held for 32 300 participants, 172 study circles were held for 3 800 people and special 1-3 day courses were organised for various target groups such as *instituteurs*, *ITC*, etc. At the central school level, it was planned to organise new-type *recyclage* courses to update and explain party strategy in the run-up to the Common Programme. Thus, in Martin’s words, the Party’s educational machine was in good health and was confidently expected to respond to the ideological demands posed by the Left Union period.

TABLE 5.1 Elementary Schools 1966-73

Year	No. of students participating	Accumulative increase/decrease on previous year	No. of schools organised	Accumulative increase/decrease on previous year
1966-67	7373		845	
1967-68	8587	+1214	1007	+162
1968-69	8571	-16	998	-9
1969-70	10 416	+1829	1145	+138
1970-71	7165	-3251	804	-341
1971-72	8208	+1043	894	+90
1972-73	12012	+3804	1295	+401

Source: Archives of the PCF, 2 place du Colonel-Fabien. Interview with Henri Martin, 31.3.1992.

TABLE 5.2 Party Schools 1969-72

Type of school	1969-70	1970-71	1971-72
<u>Elementary schools:</u>			
No. of schools held	1145	804	894
No. of students	10 416	7165	8208
<u>Federal schools:</u>			
No. of schools held	168	150	178
No. of students	2410	2271	2483
<u>Educational lectures:</u>			
No. of participants	32 200	18 500	10 280
<u>Study circles:</u>			
No. of circles held	-	55	87
No. of participants	-	1175	2000
<u>Central schools:</u> (one and four months)			
No. of students	401	492	651

Source: Archives of the PCF, 2 place du Colonel-Fabien. Interview with Henri Martin, 31.3.1992.

“L’union est un combat”

The Left Union period was an extremely animated one for the PCF and for that reason, we shall limit our focus on the presentation in the study programmes of the most relevant themes, namely the process and problems of the Left Union; the role of the working class in a Communist Party attempting to woo the middle classes; and the PCF’s changing attitude towards the USSR and the other socialist countries. As the primary archival material available for this period is particularly detailed and rich, we are able to present and analyse hitherto unexplored information concerning the students’ sociological composition and their time spent at party schools.

The Common Programme was signed in June 1972, and in the July-August issue of *Cahiers du communisme*¹⁶ André Boursier (who taught at the Central School) wrote

about the changes to the Party's education programmes prompted by "*l'intensité de la bataille idéologique*" which necessitated an even greater effort to master theory. Two modifications were introduced: first, the relationship between theory and practice (policy) was tipped in favour of theory ("*étudier la politique sur la base des principes théoriques*"); and second, teaching was to be oriented towards the students' personal work. The aim was to arm the future cadres with a real method of thought and analysis and thus encourage them towards permanent study: "*L'école ne peut former des 'communistes accomplis' mais elle doit leur donner les moyens d'y parvenir.*" According to Henri Martin, by about this time, the schools had gone back to reading Marx "in the original": "*Dès 1970, on lisait directement Marx dans le texte; pendant une période, on lisait Marx à travers Lénine, avant, à travers Staline - ce qui était très mauvais ...*" This cut out a great deal of unnecessary explanation and enabled the militants to take direct action on the basis of Marxist theory; as Martin put it, "*C'est mieux qu'attendre L'Huma du lendemain ou d'avoir une réunion de la direction pour répondre.*"¹⁷

The *schémas*¹⁸ distributed to the federal school teachers in September 1972 by the *Section d'éducation* illustrated the new trend towards the teaching of more philosophy. However, the topical theme was naturally that of "*unité et union populaire*". French society was portrayed as in a deep crisis, with the battle against the "conservative forces" now taking place in new conditions, thanks to the Common Programme. The unity of the working class was the crucial prerequisite for the formation of a wide "*rassemblement contre les monopoles, pour une démocratie avancée*". Yet, the setting up of a "*front unique et l'union populaire*" was not a matter of circumstance, tactic or sentiment: it was a permanent feature of the class struggle and did not signify the abandonment of that struggle - in fact, it would be an enriching element. The students were reminded that the Common Programme did not "constitute an ideological agreement", which was "neither desirable nor possible". The PCF's role within the Left Union was to provide the only guarantee of unity and for this, the Party needed to be "ideologically strong".

As befitted the new era of wooing the middle classes, the *schéma* outlining the theme "*Les classes sociales et le rôle national de la classe ouvrière*" devoted a substantial

section to the growing importance of “*les couches intermédiaires des salariés*” and the increasing role of the intellectuals. These *couches intermédiaires* no longer represented a single homogeneous category but rather a constantly changing mass of people. The traditional groups were getting smaller; new groups were making their appearance thanks to scientific and technological progress; *employés* as a category resembled more and more the working class as a result of capitalist exploitation; the *ITC* group was in a contradictory situation as both producers and collectors of profit but was rapidly joining the working class; and finally, the number of teachers (intellectuals) was growing steadily. Therefore, “*alliance - mais non intégration*” was all the more necessary. This was understood by the Party in theory, but putting it into practice proved to be more difficult and posed a formidable problem to the political education system, which now faced the task of providing training for many more members representing the new categories.

The study experience of Bernard Pudal¹⁹ illustrates the problems encountered by the party education system, which had not caught up with the needs of the new type of student. Pudal’s background was that of a typical intellectual at the time: *génération 68*, student at the *Institut des sciences sociales du travail* of Paris University, and a PCF member since 1968. As a cell secretary in Vitry-sur-Seine and intellectual, Pudal soon encountered the distrust of the party apparatus, which was concerned about the arrival of “*ces étudiants barbus et chevelus*”. Nevertheless, in an effort to “check” him, Pudal was told to participate in a two-week federal school held in an *internat* in the early 1970s. Impressed by the Party’s *ouvriérisme*, he was keen to “go and imitate the working-class members of whom we [university students] did not really know anything at all”. The content of the school programme made no impression on Pudal: “*Je n’ai aucun souvenir du contenu! Aucun! Aucun souvenir du contenu!*” However, what he does remember is the atmosphere, a very “studious, warm atmosphere”, which he found very moving because he “was going to school with workers who had responsibilities in trade unions”. For Pudal, the training course thus represented his idea of the “unity of theory and practice”: it was a “kind of emotional and sentimental reconciliation with the Party” for the type of student he represented who had “learned at university about the history of the labour movement” and now sat at the party training school seeing it with

his own eyes and was “part of it”. His experience was “comparable to the Holy Communion” which was accelerated and reinforced by the mental and physical isolation during the school period. So overwhelmed was he by the atmosphere that during his fortnight, despite severe toothache, he could not bring himself to break away from his comrades to see a dentist: “*Et pour rien du monde je n’aurais quitté l’école, pour me faire arracher la dent - je ne voulais absolument pas! Pour moi, c’est surtout un indicateur du désir d’être avec, d’être de ce populisme dont on est porteur. Moi, j’étais porteur.*” Although he had “not gained anything” from the course content, he did not dismiss it as altogether unsuitable: “It was not the content, the training was not all that conservative for the *workers* involved. It was just not for people like me. In fact, the school was very much an occasion to test us, and I *was* a little suspect ...”

Pudal was not the only one of his *genre*. There were many others who, because of their higher level of education, were not suited to the kind of training that the Party was still providing. Another notable example was Jean-Marie Argelès who was the secretary of the Paris federation 1971-79 and an *agrégé* (holder of the highest teaching qualification in France). He had “managed to avoid all party schools”²⁰ until 1978, when he was finally persuaded to participate in a two-week *stage de recyclage*. Both Pudal and Argelès (Argelès had nevertheless taught in central schools) thought that the simplistic training programmes and methods were an important factor in the Party’s decline in the 1980s. Although the party education officials were making attempts to adapt the syllabus and style to respond to the needs of the new type of student by including more philosophy and theory, the task was a most difficult balancing act since a certain amount of “simplicity” had to be retained for the majority. As Pudal put it, “*Les écoles élémentaires, les manuels, ça paraît aux gens avec le baccalauréat un peu dérisoire ... les cadres ouvriers, oui.*”

Partly to address shortcomings of this kind, Marie-Hélène Lavallard (teaching Marxist philosophy at the central school) was asked to organise new theoretical training courses for wider audiences at all levels in the form of mass lectures, study circles and *stages de perfectionnement théorique*. They were to take place in special *centres de formation permanente* which would dispense political training *à la carte*.²¹

A typical *stage de perfectionnement*²² in the 1970s aimed to update the thinking in the main areas of philosophy, political economy and current party policy. These subject areas were treated in presentations and discussions and through a personal reading programme. The bibliography to read included Marx and Engels, Lenin, *Cahiers du communisme* (covering the 18th, 19th and 20th Congresses), the newly published *Traité d'économie politique*, the journal *Economie et politique*, texts by Waldeck Rochet and by the up-and-coming party economist Philippe Herzog, the Champigny Manifesto (1968), the PCF's new programme "*Changer de cap*" (1971), the text of the Common Programme, and Marchais's "*Le Défi démocratique*" (1973). An additional section was devoted to party history, *Notions d'histoire*, which covered topics such as the history of the international labour movement, the history of the USSR, and also included lectures on the People's Democracies and the national liberation movements. French history was dealt with from the point of view of the French labour movement (*Notions d'histoire de la Nation et du Mouvement ouvrier français*) and the history of the PCF.

Cultural aspects were not forgotten, and lectures were given on Descartes, Molière, Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, Balzac, Aragon, Soviet literature and sciences. However, the comment made by Raymond Constans, who participated in the two-week update course described above and worked hard to catch up with the new thinking, speaks volumes of the Party's *retard* almost two decades after the CPSU's 20th Congress: "The schools enabled me to question 'Stalinism'; from that point of view, the 1974 training course helped me a lot." This short comment is an apt illustration of the general resistance to change which had prevailed in the Party and within its political education system for almost two decades.

After the 21st (Extraordinary) Congress in October 1974, the PCF leadership decided that even greater educational efforts had to be made to maintain the Party's ability to respond to the growing Socialist threat. Etienne Fajon, the tireless organiser of the training system, was brought back to head the vital political education section once more. This seemed an odd choice at the time, given Fajon's Thorezian credentials and well-known conservatism²³ and is probably an indication of the Party's internal power

struggles between the supporters and opponents of the Left Union. Whatever the reasons, there was no doubt about his organisational ability: a year later, Fajon presented his report²⁴ to the Central Committee for the period August 1974 - August 1975. At the highest level, two four-month and 12 one-month central schools had been held with over 600 students participating. Special two-week courses for certain target groups (women, working-class activists, peasants) had also been organised at this level. As for federal schools, 220 schools had been run for 3327 students from 85 federations. Statistics for elementary schools had not yet been collated, but a new brochure had been printed and all 50 000 copies had been distributed. Henri Martin observed that for the last five or six years, elementary school student numbers had been virtually doubling: "What characterises most of the new members - and especially the young people who are the most numerous - is their obvious *soif d'apprendre*, a willingness to understand WITH the Party, IN the Party, the profound reasons for the crisis and to discover the means to really get out of the crisis and to march towards a socialist society."²⁵ Thus, great efforts were being made to provide both old and new members of the Party with new tools to move the Party towards "socialism in French colours".

"Socialisme aux couleurs de la France"

The 22nd Congress in 1976 was generally considered by the Communists as a turning point in terms of competition for ideological ground with the Socialists. Modifications to the training programme started to appear in the study programmes in the summer of 1976. Whereas philosophy and political economy were not subject to any major overhauls, "scientific socialism", dealing with the application of theory to the current political situation, underwent a number of changes in order to reflect the new party line.

All levels of political training incorporated the new ideas promoted by the 22nd Congress. The 1976 training manual, *Les principes de la politique du PCF*,²⁶ elucidated the modifications as follows: "*le socialisme aux couleurs de la France*" did not correspond to the idea of "dictatorship of the proletariat" which is why the Congress had decided to abandon this notion. Moreover, although the PCF's revolutionary tenets were reiterated it was pointed out that "revolution is not synonymous with violence. Civil war

does not figure in the objectives of our Party." The changes that had taken place within French society were also explained to the students. According to the Party, the working class was expanding: "Far from getting smaller, the working class constitutes the essential body of salaried workers", a result of the changes in the composition of the *couches intermédiaires*. Consequently, the leading role of the working class in the alliance was not diminishing but growing. On the subject of the Left Union, it still remained a "*combat*": firstly, because the bourgeoisie was making every effort to break it, and secondly, because "this pressure was not without echo within the PS". This was why the PCF had to pursue its ideological and political struggle against "reformist ideas and practices": "*Pour une union forte, il faut un Parti communiste fort.*" Battle lines were clearly being drawn up.

The second important topic emerging during the Left Union and closely linked to the alliance, was that of the leading role of the working class. The four-month school held in February-June 1976 had on the reading list an article written by Marcel Zaidner (teaching at the central school), "*Les ouvriers en grand nombre dans les directions - pourquoi?*". This was the Party's justification for workerism: the PCF was, after all, the party of the working class - therefore, it was only natural that it should be led by workers (49.6% of the Central Committee were workers in 1976²⁷). The CP was the only party to create the conditions for workers to participate directly in "the reflection, implementation and direction" of political action at all levels. In this way, explained Zaidner, the Party had changed the situation in France: "Workers can be a leading, active and conscious force with a right to political leadership; a modern conquest of the working class is the work of the PCF." This was not to say that militants from other social classes were not given an equal chance: "All Communists have the same rights ... that is the democratic rule of the Party."

Zaidner continued the same workerist theme in the *Cahiers du communisme*,²⁸ also on the central school reading list. He explained that one of the original features of the Party's cadre policy was that it favoured the training and promotion of working-class cadres. Unfortunately for France, wrote Zaidner, workers had been kept out of government since 1947. If there were any workers in politics at higher levels, "it was

virtually all thanks to the PCF". All this tied up neatly with the realisation of the PCF that it was not making enough headway in competing with the PS over the new middle classes; a return to the tried and tested was therefore going to be the only alternative.

By the end of 1977, the updating of the Common Programme had become a crucial issue in the PCF-PS alliance. The four-month school held in September 1977 - January 1978 presented the students with *"Dossier no. 1: PS - front de classe, union du peuple de France (Diffusion strictement intérieure)"*²⁹ which contained a number of key articles on the subject for the students to study and discuss.

Guy Perrimond's article in the Dossier, *"Eurocommunisme et compromis historique"* (originally published in *L'Unité*, 18-24.11.1977) reviewed the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution in a critical way which was typical of the "independent" mood reigning in the PCF: *"Enrico Berlinguer, s'il se rend à Moscou, ne songe qu'à critiquer; Santiago Carrillo, lui, est contraint de se taire et Georges Marchais, plus simplement, est resté à Paris."* Apart from distancing itself from the USSR, there were other facets to the PCF's Eurocommunism: like the Italian and Spanish CPs, the French party was simply forced to introduce these policy shifts because of the changed (and changing) domestic political situation (i.e. the growing popularity of the PS) - or perhaps it was even tempted to try its own *"compromis historique"* as Perrimond suggests. The PCF's dilemma in the approach of the 1978 legislative elections was outlined clearly and openly and for this reason, it is worth quoting here in its entirety:

"[Face à cela] le PCF n'avait aucune alternative que changer ou aller [...] de l'opportunisme - l'union du peuple de France - au sectarisme - la situation actuelle. Et parfois, ce qui n'a rien d'étonnant, pratiquer les deux en même temps. Qui n'a pas été étonné par les modifications brutales du PC sur l'armée, sur l'Europe? Qui n'a pas trouvé étranges certains appels à la bourgeoisie non monopoliste, à l'Eglise? Dans l'incapacité, compte tenu de la réalité française, de proposer un véritable compromis historique comme le font - avec quelques difficultés d'ailleurs - les communistes italiens, le PCF voulant tout à la fois protéger ses terres préservées [...], son organisation et quelques principes qu'elle n'a pas encore mis en question, et tenter d'élargir l'alliance au point d'y noyer le PS, le PCF donc ne pouvait que retrouver des habitudes que l'on espérait perdues. [...] Ce repliement sur soi - masqué par un oecuménisme militant - est le signe de la profonde crise d'identité que connaissent les différents PC, et notamment le PCF. La dialectique de l'union le contraint en

effet à des choix encore déchirants. OU accepter la logique du processus et, en même temps que poursuivre la dérussification, s'engager dans une 'déstalinisation' véritable. C'est-à-dire, modifier ce à quoi les communistes tiennent 'comme à la prune de leurs yeux'. OU tenter d'être à la fois plus 'à gauche' et plus 'ouvert' sans toucher au Parti lui-même et à ses principes. C'est ce qui se passe en ce moment. [...] Il est évident qu'une telle attitude ne peut être que provisoire."

Perrimond's honesty and outspokenness in his appraisal of the PCF's predicament were impressive. Equally impressive and indicative of the more liberal thinking - at the time - was the central school's decision to treat the subject so openly, albeit amidst a "trusted" trainee cadre audience. Unfortunately, we do not know what kind of a debate or reaction ensued on the basis of Perrimond's article; it was certainly included in the study programme to give food for thought.

Eurocommunism in political education: a subtle shift

Eurocommunism was a term used to define the changed attitudes during the 1970s of at least three of the communist parties of Western Europe. It covered their theoretical stances, strategies and behaviour in relation to the USSR, to communist countries and to the international communist movement and, additionally, to Western Europe and the parties' respective countries.³⁰ There were circumstantial reasons for Eurocommunism which include the decline of the Soviet myth; the disintegration of the international communist movement (as evidenced by the Sino-Soviet dispute); the fact that any attachment to the USSR was now considered a handicap in the national power stakes; and the process of *détente* which enabled the communist parties to further their autonomy from the Soviet Union.³¹

The changing policies of the PCF in the 1970s can best be understood in the context of the Party's competition with the PS for left-wing hegemony. Thus, the signing of the Common Programme opened up a new era in the Communist-Socialist relationship and this obviously had consequences for the Party's international relations. The PCF's fraternal relationship with Moscow started to cool off as the Party sought to disengage itself from many aspects of Soviet influence. However, despite its limitations and the fact that the strategy was an obvious tactical necessity in the PCF's competition with the

rejuvenated PS, the PCF's Eurocommunist phase was also a real and symbolic - albeit short-lived - "act of defiance" expressed by *la fille aînée* against the father figure of socialism.

From 1975 onward, the PCF criticised the USSR in certain political and ideological matters. In October 1975, the Party "deplored" the incarceration of the Soviet dissident Leonid Plyushch in a mental hospital. The Politbureau also criticised the Soviet labour camps shown in a television documentary.³² Jean Elleinstein, a leading party historian, published *L'histoire de l'URSS* and *L'histoire du phénomène stalinien* which revealed some unpalatable truths about the Soviet Union but which, at the same time, "disengaged the PCF from its historical responsibility".³³ Marchais used the term "Stalinism" for the first time in May 1975 - but with the qualification that "*le PCF n'était pas concerné par cela*".³⁴ (Yet, it was not until 1977 that the PCF admitted "officially" that its delegation had in fact known about Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 - this had been flatly denied for 20 years.³⁵)

As for the international Communist movement, the PCF remained an active member and participated in the various conferences organised by communist parties across Europe.³⁶ Bilateral relations were also cultivated, in particular with the PCI and PCE, although here, too, there were differences (the PCI, in particular, was much more critical of the USSR and Eastern bloc countries, more open to dialogue and in favour of a more far-reaching modernisation programme).

As a result of the extensive criticism directed towards the USSR by the PCF, the relations between the two parties deteriorated to such an extent that no Soviet leadership representative attended the PCF's 22nd Congress in 1976. Marchais in turn did not go the CPSU's 25th Congress in Moscow. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, the period of "separation" was never complete and definite, since throughout the 1975-78 strategy the PCF maintained effective links with the USSR and continued to sing the praises of the Socialist bloc. Expanding autonomy and distance were not to be confused with actual anti-Sovietism. Therefore, the complete reversal of the 1975-78 policy never came as a complete surprise - rather it was consistent with the Party's previous record of

volte-face and the fact that the leadership was never really too clear about how far the PCF could or should pursue the new goals in changed and constantly changing circumstances.

As usual, the tactical shifts in the relations between the PCF and the CPSU were also reflected by the political education programmes. Unlike 1956, this time there were no abrupt changes; rather the conspicuousness of Soviet-linked topics was reduced subtly as the focus moved from the CPSU and Soviet history to the PCF and French history during the 'independent' Eurocommunist phase. Between 1972 and 1979 the Soviet Union and other socialist countries appeared to become just one subject among many, rather than being the alpha and omega of political training. On the basis of the study programmes and *schémas* that were available, it is possible to make the following observations as regards this subtle evolution which was clearly linked with the PCF's current Left Alliance tactics:

- Between the PCF's 20th Congress in 1972 and the 22nd Congress in 1976, the USSR was dealt with in *all* study programmes in the section "*Notions d'histoire*" which included themes such as "The Nation and the labour movement (from feudalism to the Commune and 1917)"; history of the PCF (1917-58); history of the USSR; the international communist movement; Latin America, China and the Middle East (or other regions). The section concerning the USSR usually also included extensive *travail personnel*, with students researching much of the subject themselves and presenting their ideas in discussions.

- After the 22nd Congress in 1976, the emphasis in "*Notions d'histoire*" shifted to the history of the PCF; the history of the USSR became conspicuous by its virtual absence. Other themes under "*Notions d'histoire*" concerned the international communist movement, the October Revolution and the III International.³⁷ The subsequent four-month school held from September 1977 to January 1978 additionally featured the socialist countries in Europe. During 1978, "*Notions d'histoire*" only presented the history of the Nation and that of the PCF (1917-72). The themes of the international communist movement, the socialist countries in Europe and "the new international

situation" had been moved to the end of the section dealing with scientific socialism.³⁸ The old tradition of sending "promising" cadres to perfect their political education in Moscow also came to an end in the mid-1970s as the PCF began to distance itself from the CPSU.³⁹

- It was not until after the 23rd Congress in 1979 which marked the return of the PCF to the Soviet fold that the study programmes again included a clearly defined and detailed section dealing with the Soviet bloc.⁴⁰ This tied up with the recommencement of the summit meetings with the CPSU in July 1979 with Maxim Gremetz and Boris Ponomarev meeting in Moscow.⁴¹

Jean-Marie Argelès, who attended a two-week *cours de recyclage* in 1978, confirms the process described above. In 1978, his study programme was still based on the guidelines issued by the 22nd Congress in 1976: the history of the USSR and CPSU was still "taught" but, at the same time, the USSR was heavily criticised. According to Argelès, "the language used at school was much more critical than that of the Party which was already preparing its 23rd Congress; the party line was therefore already hardening up whereas the school was still being run along the lines of the 22nd Congress".⁴²

Thus, neither the Party nor the study programmes shut all the doors during the PCF's Eurocommunist period. Rather than simply abandoning the Soviet theme (an impossibility in any case: it was one thing to deny the existence of a "model" but quite another to deny the Party's *raison d'être*!), its importance was tactically played down, for the time being. Wise from past experience, the PCF leadership clearly wanted to keep its options open whilst waiting to see which way the uneasy competition for left-wing hegemony at home was going.

"Fermez la télé, lisez L'Humanité!"⁴³

The collapse of the Left Union and the Left's election defeat in the March 1978 legislative elections was the catalyst for the internal crisis which had been brewing in

the Party, in particular amongst the party intellectuals. "*Le Parti et les intellectuels*" had been a study theme in the central schools for a long time but it now acquired a new urgency and special significance in view of the explosive situation. The students participating in the four-month central school from September 1978 to January 1979 had a dossier⁴⁴ of articles to prepare for a discussion about the role of intellectuals in the Party. These included Georges Marchais' "*Le Parti et les intellectuels*", Jacques Chambaz's article published in *Cahiers du communisme* (no. 2, 1977), François Hincker's article (no. 10, 1977) and a copy of Marchais' speech to the party intellectuals at the famous Politbureau meeting in Vitry 9-10.12.1978. In the last-mentioned document, after discussing the whole spectrum of party policy⁴⁵ Marchais finally approached the subject of "intellectuals in the Party". The criticism expressed by the intellectuals as regards the organisational principles of the Party (democratic centralism) received short shrift: "... it is a revolutionary condition, a condition for the realisation of the democratic way and of socialism in France." Marchais robustly rejected the "wholly unjustified" accusation that the Party held its intellectuals in contempt: "Our Party, the party of the working class has at this very moment amongst its members tens of thousands of men and women exercising all manner of professions. [...] Today our Party has itself become '*un intellectuel collectif*' which elaborates its own theory and policy. Our party intellectuals in their entirety contribute to this task." It was made clear to the students that although the Politbureau fully acknowledged the validity of the discussion concerning the intellectuals and had undertaken to tackle the problems caused by Stalinism as well as to improve the functioning of democratic centralism, there was to be no shift on the essential issues raised by the dissatisfied intellectuals as the Party limped towards its 23rd Congress. Marchais' attitude was a perfect illustration of what was fundamental to the whole history of the PCF: tactics were changeable whereas party practices, structures, basic doctrine and ideology were not. Any further development of Eurocommunist ideas was thus abandoned, and the schools had to convey this new *volte-face* to their students.

The 23rd Congress caught the PCF in the midst of a vacuum and confusion, "*sans aucune stratégie de pouvoir*".⁴⁶ True to form, the study programmes mirrored the major changes imposed by the 23rd Congress themes. It took the education section the rest of

the year 1979 before a revamped syllabus was ready for use. In September 1979, the education programmes were introducing the Party's ideas on any future union "from below", in "*Une voie nouvelle pour une union nouvelle*",⁴⁷ a lecture by Henri Martin who had now taken on the directorship of the central school (1977-83). "Advanced democracy" (a fixed stage) now gave way to "democratic advance", achieved through a progressive series of struggles to attain the goal of *socialisme autogestionnaire* in order to replace State Monopoly Capitalism. Party theory was no longer described as "Marxism-Leninism" but as "scientific socialism", a real science which was constantly being enriched and expanded. By March 1980, a new study programme⁴⁸ for the one-month central schools was out. The brochure was now called officially "*Socialisme scientifique*" as decided by the Congress and divided into four sections: philosophy, political economy, theory and social reality, and Party history. In the section dealing with the PCF in French society, the Party reaffirmed its revolutionary identity as opposed to the reformist PS with catch phrases such as "*l'essence révolutionnaire se développe de manière concrète*"; "*parti révolutionnaire et théorie révolutionnaire*"; "*formes d'organisation et de fonctionnement permettent au parti révolutionnaire d'exprimer son essence*" - a clear reference to the maintenance of democratic centralism in the Party. Finally, by May 1980, a more developed version⁴⁹ of the study programme clearly confirmed the return in force of the themes concerning the USSR and other socialist countries under their own heading as the *bilan globalement positif* became a *formidable bilan de réalisations positives* in June 1980.⁵⁰

The student population of the central schools 1974-80: *démocratie avancée*?

According to Philippe Robrieux, militants chosen to go to the one-month central school had in fact already been preselected to become party functionaries; to have been selected for the four-month school therefore meant a definite career in the Party⁵¹ and a material dependence on it. Given the school's role in elite recruitment it is thus important to establish what kind of people formed the central schools' student population. Up to this point, it has not been possible to provide accurate and reliable details as primary archival material has only been available to a limited degree. For this period, however, the

archives of the *Ecole nationale du PCF* at Draveil (Essonne) have provided a wealth of information.

The sociological composition of the student population

Henri Martin was the director of the Central School in 1977-83 after being involved with other aspects of cadre training for many years. Like his predecessors, he also had risen to his post through the "system".⁵² Born in 1927 to a Communist father and Catholic mother, Martin had left school at the age of thirteen to start work as a steelworker. During the war he joined the PCF "through patriotism" and joined the merchant navy as a mechanic after the war. He was arrested for complicity in sabotage on board his ship (he was innocent) and for spreading communist propaganda against the Indo-China war, and was sentenced to five years in prison in 1950. This made him a party hero, and popular campaigns for his liberation were organised; he was finally freed in 1953. Martin participated in the four-month central school in 1954 straight from prison and became a full-time party functionary, rising to the Central Committee in 1956. Under Henri Martin's leadership the Central Education Section kept detailed records of the one-month and four-month central schools (information concerning elementary and federal schools was less complete, as it depended on the efficiency and willingness of the cells and federations to return data). In general, 10 one-month and two four-month central schools were organised every year (in 1977 and 1978, there were 8 one-month schools and in 1979 there were 9 in that year and only one four-month school, probably because of the various elections and the 23rd Congress which all kept the Party organisation busy). Records were kept on student numbers, the percentage of female students, the average age of students, their occupation, the year they had joined the PCF, their level of responsibility in the Party, their membership in trades unions and other mass movements, and their responsibilities and duties as elected representatives on local, regional and national level.

Certain problems were encountered in analysing the data revealed in these records. First, numbers do not always add up as students may have joined courses later or dropped out, and this was not always accurately recorded in the final figures. Second,

socio-professional categories detailed in our analysis only include the main groups (workers, clerical workers/*employés*, *ITC* or *ingénieurs*, *techniciens et cadres*, and teachers/researchers) as only insignificant and often inconsistent figures for other occupations are shown; therefore, they do not have much bearing on the overall picture which emerges. It is also worth mentioning here that the definition of *ouvrier* is somewhat deceptive since it is virtually impossible to know when the individual concerned last exercised that profession; indeed, most students in the four-month central school were already full-time party or trades union officials. As always with the PCF, it was the individual's original profession which remained with them throughout their life - once an *ouvrier*, always an *ouvrier*.⁵³

One-month schools 1974-80

The archives available at the *Ecole centrale du PCF* at Draveil contained details of six schools for 1974 (total number of schools held not available); of all ten schools held in 1975 and 1976; of all eight held in 1977; of seven in 1978 (out of eight held); of all nine in 1979; and of six in 1980 (of ten held).

TABLE 5.3 One-month central schools 1974-1980 (generally 10 schools a year; no. of schools with details available shown in brackets)

	Joined the PCF	1974 (6)	1975 (10)	1976 (10)	1977 (8)	1978 (7)	1979 (9)	1980 (6)	Total	Percentage
Number of students		368	570	544	627	411	286	242	3263	
Women		79	132	135	176	103	82	69	776	23.8%
Average age		28.5	29	29	29	30	29	30	Av. age 29	
Workers		85	178	169	215	121	98	75	941	28.8%
<i>Employés</i>		90	113	110	131	84	61	55	644	19.7%
ITC		61	89	111	97	52	32	40	482	14.8%
Teachers / Researchers		94	123	98	110	109	58	38	630	19.3%
	1945- 55	3	7	5	5	2	1	-	23	0.7%
	1956- 68	110	206	175	109	72	36	39	747	22.9%
	1969-	222	356	361	503	326	171	203	2142	65.6%
Members of mass movements		120	105	123	113	113	50	66	690	21.1%
Elected representatives		12	14	6	49	62	25	21	189	5.8%

Source: Calculated from archival data of the *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français* (Draveil, Essonne)

The records show that 3263 students were trained in 1974-80 (however, to that figure there must be added the “missing” student numbers, i.e. nine schools with an average of perhaps 40 plus students per school, suggesting a total number well over 3500). Of the 3263 recorded students, 776 were women (23.8%). The average age of the students was 29 years. Manual and clerical workers were in majority: 941 manual (28.8%) and 644 clerical workers (19.7%). Teachers/researchers followed closely behind with 630 students (19.3%) and the *ITC* category was also well represented with 482 students (14.8%); this showed clearly the new type of *militant* typical of the Left Union period.

The socio-professional breakdown of the one-month schools thus indicates a good mixture and bears witness to the Party's efforts to attract a following from outside its traditional *clientèle*.

The vast majority of the one-month central school students had joined the PCF after 1969 (65.6%). Here the records are somewhat muddled as different party officials have used different definitions for dates of joining, which leads to some overlapping. Mass movement membership embraced a wide spectrum of organisations from the *Jeunesse communiste* to *Parents d'élèves* and the *Secours rouge* (21.1% of all students). Finally, about 6% were elected representatives (from local councillors to mayors).

Four-month schools 1974-80

Two four-month central schools were held every year 1974-80 (except in 1979 when only one was held in October 1979 - January 1980, probably because of the preparation of the *volte-face* 23rd congress). The four-month schools were generally held from February to June or from March to July, and again from October to January/February. Records were available for all four-month schools held during 1974-80.

TABLE 5.4 Four-month central schools 1974-1980 (generally 2 schools a year; no. of schools with details available shown in brackets)

	Joined the PCF	1974 (2)	1975 (2)	1976 (2)	1977 (2)	1978 (2)	1979 (1)	1980 (2)	Total	Percentage
Number of students		64	65	49	47	99	39	68	431	
Women		6	12	12	11	18	4	14	77	17.9%
Average age		33	31.5	31.5	31	30.5	32	34	Av. age 32	
Workers		38	32	22	26	39	18	31	206	47.8%
<i>Employés</i>		4	11	10	8	20	7	15	75	17.4%
ITC		10	9	9	8	20	8	4	68	15.8%
Teachers / Researchers		7	5	3	3	11	2	9	40	9.3%
	1945- 55	5	4	2	-	2	1	1	15	3.5%
	1956- 68	49	40	34	28	42	11	32	236	54.8%
	1969-	10	21	13	19	55	27	35	180	41.7%
Members of mass movements		22	25	11	16	13	5	4	96	22.3%
Elected representatives		9	6	4	8	24	12	12	75	17.4%

Source: Calculated from archival data of the *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français* (Draveil, Essonne)

In all, 431 students participated in the four-month schools during the period under examination. Amongst the 431, there were 77 women (17.9%), and the students' average age at 32 years was slightly higher than in the one-month schools. The schools were dominated by working-class students who numbered 206 (47.8%). Clerical workers and the *ITC* category were far behind with 75 (17.4%) and 68 (15.8%) students respectively. Only 40 teachers went to the four-month schools (9.3%) during 1974-80.

The majority of students had joined the PCF in 1956-68 (236, i.e. 54.8%) or in 1969-79 (180, i.e. 41.7%). Only 15 had been members since before 1956. Those involved in mass organisations numbered 122 (28.3% of all students), and there were 86 elected

representatives (20%) of whom one was a senator and one a deputy in the National Assembly.

Some interesting conclusions emerge from the above analysis. First, the one-month schools preparing *militants* for middle-level leadership accurately reflect the PCF's changing membership in the 1970s and correspond to the observations made by Courtois and Lazar. Their students were young (29), and almost a quarter of them were women (although still fewer than the 35.7% in the entire Party in 1979⁵⁴). They were also “deproletarianised” to a remarkable extent: workers, clerical workers, ITCs and teachers were all fairly evenly represented. This was a fairly accurate reflection of the social composition of the PCF membership in 1979: 30.8% of it was workers (compared with 43.4% in 1967).⁵⁵ Their political generation was young, as 65% had joined the PCF after 1969 (36% of the middle leadership belonged to that generation in the whole Party⁵⁶). The one-month schools were therefore largely dominated by the new, post-1968, pro-left-union generation.

The four-month schools, on the other hand, reveal quite a different picture. More than half of the students had joined the Party before 1968, and many were of the Thorezian era. The schools were heavily dominated by workers (47.8%) with all other categories lagging well behind. The students' sociological composition was in fact a mirror image of the top leadership structure in which workers represented 49.6% of all members of the Central Committee in 1976.⁵⁷ This was a clear indication of the Party's deliberate intention to ensure the “social purity” of future cadres and to retain all decision-making organs in the hands of working-class, trained militants through a systematic process of preselection aimed at “reproletarianising” the Party.

***“Des élèves heureux”:*⁵⁸ the bonding process at the central school**

The importance of the *internat* type of courses during this period of change and uncertainty cannot be emphasised strongly enough. As individual accounts show, the study environment and atmosphere certainly succeeded in maintaining a significant

amount of internal unity and discipline at the core of the Party when the Left Union collapsed and an unprecedented intra-party rift began to emerge.

The closing speech⁵⁹ at the end of the four-month school held in February-June 1975 school provides an interesting insight into the functioning of the Party's top training establishment. As always at the end of a training period, the organisation of the school was evaluated and *la vie collective* scrutinised in detail. "*La cohésion du collectif*" received a favourable verdict as students had "got on well with each other and their teachers". This obviously meant that the bonding process so crucial to the unity and cohesion of each *promotion* had been successful. Certain practical improvements were advocated as regards food (which was, surprisingly, "*insuffisante et mal adaptée aux besoins*"!), working conditions (noise from the street and a nearby school, cramped and difficult to practise any sport), and equipment (for example, the library was "poorly stocked"). The predominantly working-class students (16 workers, five *employés*, four *ITC* and one teacher) considered the teaching methods to be generally appropriate; personal study tasks had been found demanding but attainable and working in groups had proved to be efficient and beneficial. The lessons and lectures had been of "a very high standard and put across clearly" (advance *schémas* were found particularly useful). The regular discussions were considered a useful learning tool (discussions on theoretical points were particularly welcome) and wide-ranging debates (on unity, for example) were thought to facilitate greatly the application of theory to current political tasks. This particular *promotion* decided to be called "*la promotion Jacques Duclos*" to honour the life and work of Jacques Duclos who died during their time at the central school. The participants were now returning to their federations "with a conviction that we would not return as the same people who had come [to the school] ... By enriching our theoretical knowledge we are certain that we have achieved a greater mastery of problems which we have to face in our activist lives". Thus the four-month cadre school was deemed to have succeeded in its aim to bring about the final transformation of the students into "complete" Communist persons (see Chapter 2).

Similar feelings were expressed by Marcel Gauterie (whose profession was not stated), who completed the one-month central school in 1974 and wrote of his experiences in

France Nouvelle.⁶⁰ Above all he had felt able to clarify his theoretical knowledge of Marxism - "or to be more precise, I realised the limits imposed by my ignorance". He also gained a better understanding of party policy, "this party that has been mine for almost 20 years". But the training period also raised some questions: "How does it come about that I no longer see this party or myself as before? ... Was I in 'the parallel university of a counter-society' which I have penetrated more profoundly than ever in the past, in the heart of this collective intellectual mass which the PCF has become in the course of its time and struggles?"

As to Gauterie's fellow students, they had, despite their diversity, one thing in common: "All the students are Communists and want to learn to struggle better in and for their Party. This basis, our common property, is *what bonds us together* ... [...] In addition to that, these party schools are essentially for workers, excluded from knowledge by social division inherent in the capitalist system." Yet, to spend an uninterrupted month at school was "a liberation as much as a constraint". It meant having the freedom to "*apprendre à comprendre*", all day long, the classics of Marxism: "*Finies les tentatives hardies de lire Marx après la journée de travail, harassante, dans la nuit!*" However, the students found intellectual work exhausting for the unaccustomed: "*Marx, c'est compliqué! - Heureusement qu'il n'écrit pas dans l'Huma! entendait-on quelquefois.*"

There were 41 students on Gauterie's course (30 workers and 11 intellectuals), and he saw the party schools as instrumental in breaking down the age-old barrier between manual and intellectual work: "This possibility at last to see manual workers and intellectuals communicating with each other on the basis of a common language and for the enriching of all is, in my opinion, one of the profound reasons why the students of the central schools are, in the words of Harris and de Sédouy, '*des élèves heureux*', happy to be there and to learn to be active." As pointed out in Chapter 2, this was indeed one of the functions of political education in the PCF: to maintain ideological unity between *la base intellectuelle* and *la base ouvrière* in order to control them both.

Political training had a profound effect on Marcel Gauterie as on most other students. He, too, evokes the psychological impact that "going to school" had on him: "Being at school is a little like going through psychoanalysis; yet, it's not really a question of a

psychoanalysis, but of Marxism, and you relate better to yourself and to others. When you leave the school, you are no longer quite the same as before and yet, not all that different either.” For Gauterie, the school had been only “*un long détour théorique pour revenir à l’expérience, à la pratique*”, the concept of the “unity of theory and practice” which he had now “truly” internalised.

The experience of Antoine Spire, a party intellectual and journalist, echoes Gauterie’s sentiments on the psychological changes that took place amongst the students. In 1969, Spire had been “earmarked” to become an *attaché de direction* of the PCF’s publishing house *Editions sociales*, and to subsequently take over the management of the company. Before starting in his job, he was told to attend the one-month central school (February 1969). Since he was being groomed for higher responsibilities, he also had to participate in the four-month cadre school (1971). This was a requirement for his promotion: “*On ne choisit pas de fréquenter ces écoles. On est désigné pour cela.*”⁶¹ As described above (see especially Chapter 2), the decision was the result of a strict process of observation and covert testing - although candidates were extremely motivated, ‘volunteerism’ was not sufficient.

Spire’s fellow-students were mostly full-time functionaries and of working-class origin. As Spire put it, the cadre school constituted for them “an outstanding contact with many fields of knowledge which, up to this point, had been out of their reach”. Party education was for them a “*formidable source d’enrichissement*”,⁶² which pointed them in the direction of more personal reading and reflection. The attraction of the all-encompassing philosophy of Marxism to disempowered workers of limited education (see Chapter 2) is easy to perceive. In Spire’s experience, those who participated in the cadre school, were transformed out of all recognition: “The results were sometimes quite surprising, in the best possible sense of the term.”⁶³

Like Récanati, Poussy (see Chapter 4), Pudal and Gauterie (see above) before him, Spire also was profoundly stirred by the exceptional atmosphere of the school. There was a real “*communion de pensée*” and a deep feeling of fraternity and solidarity, which was “to leave its mark on each person’s emotional itinerary”. The long training period

encouraged "*le brassage social*" of students from different backgrounds and furthered the formation of a *sensus communismi* essential to the Party. Whilst admitting the "remote possibility" that some people may "just" consider a party training course as opportunity for advancement, Spire does not really believe in it; in his opinion, other motives are at play: "*C'est un milieu, un point de référence, un lieu de croyances, une chaude collectivité où l'accord implicite sur l'essentiel est réalisé.*"⁶⁴

Despite his praise for the school's "studious atmosphere, its enriching courses", particularly for those of working-class origin, he - like Pudal and Argelès above - felt that the school had its limitations. In particular, Spire criticised the rigid links with current party policy (one of the primary *raisons d'être* of the political education system!) and the way theory was utilised to justify the *orientation du jour*. (Yet, Spire's political training had taken place under the directorship of Jean Burlès, who made a special effort to include more theoretical thinking and freedom of expression in the 1970s.) In his memoirs Spire later wondered how a certain number of former central school students of that era "really reacted faced with the sectarian policies of the Party" in 1979.⁶⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the development of the PCF's political education system in 1965-80. The main themes examined - the process towards the Left Union and the shifts in the relations of the main protagonists; the role of the working class in the Party and the PCF's specific identity as *the* party of the working class; and the effects of the changes on PCF-CPSU relations during the Party's independent phase and its subsequent return to its traditional stance - all found their interpretations in the political training programmes. From its state of Thorezian immobilism the political education system, like the Party itself, cautiously and timidly opened up to a certain amount of debate, experimentation and flexibility. But just like the Party itself, the education system was unable to keep up with all the changes taking place in the surrounding environment. Although the party schools at higher levels still remained effective tools for moulding communist cadres, primarily because of the isolation from external influences during the training period, the intensity of the study programmes and the

careful selection of motivated students, they did not entirely succeed in catering for the needs of the new type of student, better educated and informed, who began to emerge in the 1970s. Equally, despite the training programmes' being more systematic and better organised than ever before, the schools no longer seemed such effective agents in promoting political socialisation. The daily challenges posed by the PCF's physical isolation up to the mid-1960s had had a steeling effect on both the party membership in general and the party school students in particular, whereas the alliance-building strategy and the Party's consequent opening up to the outside world rendered that need of "belonging" which the school environment fostered, often somewhat redundant and less important, in particular for students who were not of working-class origin. Initially, this resulted in major shifts in behaviour and outlook, which however prevailed only until the disappointment and fear caused by the negative impact of the Left Union on the PCF's fortunes allowed the orthodox elements of the Party to force a return to traditional stands and values - and to isolation in French politics.

The schools continued to provide a well organised common meeting ground for individuals of diverse backgrounds, which was shown in the social composition of the central school student body and confirmed the importance of the schools in propping up the "system". As far as preparing militants up to the middle-level posts in the Party, the PCF clearly accepted the heterogeneity of the student population; however, this fairly balanced picture developed a serious flaw at the highest training level in the four-month central schools. This was of course in total harmony with the leadership's policy of *centralité ouvrière*, the aim of which was to block the access of non-working-class militants to the highest level of leadership. This policy reinforced the Party's "reproletarianisation" programme in the late 1970s and the 1980s as well as furthering the PCF's growing "anti-intellectual" attitude. Thus, despite developments outside of the PCF and efforts made at party modernisation which called for a more differentiated leadership, the PCF's leadership model at the highest echelon remained resolutely stuck in the past and ill equipped for the challenges of the 1980s.

Notes and reference

1. Ironically, Thorez died only two months after his retirement, on 11th July 1964, on board a Russian ship whilst going on holiday to the Soviet Union. See ROBRUEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome IV, op. cit.*, p. 784.
2. Interview with Nicholas Pasquarelli 9.9.1991 and with Charles Fiterman, 30.3.1992. Pasquarelli was the director of the Central School at Choisy-le-Roi from September 1962 until March 1966. After his directorship ended, Pasquarelli continued to lecture at the Central School until 1972.
3. Yet, there was a notable omission in the systematic training programme: according to Pasquarelli, Georges Marchais never went to any party school!
4. Interview with Charles Fiterman 30.3.1992. According to Fiterman, it was never the Party's aim to produce homogeneous cadres - rather, they were the consequence of the training! Whatever the case, the idea was for the Party to "possess a scientific theory which would enable it to explain the present and the future, and which had to be diffused and shared in order to train people to play the part of the avant-garde which the Party had become", as Fiterman put it.
5. Interview with Nicholas Pasquarelli 9.9.1991. This practice was later dropped as in Pasquarelli's words, "*on ne peut pas vraiment porter ses appréciations pendant une période de quatre mois sur un personnage*".
6. *Cahiers du communisme*, décembre, 1967, pp. 96-108.
7. WRIGHT, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
8. *Cours 4, Ecole élémentaire*, Archives of the PCF, 2 place du Colonel-Fabien, Paris..
9. Ibid. According to this note, "our disagreements with the CPSU and other parties on the events in Czechoslovakia do not change our wish to tighten our links of friendship and solidarity with all the parties and notably with the CPSU. We do not forget the role that our 'parti frère' of the Soviet Union plays in the fight for socialism, for world peace and for freedom in France."
10. Ibid., p. 110.
11. Ibid., pp. 107-113. There were no figures for the central schools.
12. BRUNET, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
13. *Cahiers du communisme*, mai 1971, pp. 82-9.
14. BURLES, J., *Le PCF dans la société française*. (Editions sociales, 1979)
15. *Cahiers du communisme*, mai 1971, pp. 84-7.
16. *Cahiers du communisme*, 7/8, juin-juillet, 1972, pp. 3-7.
17. Interview with Henri Martin, 31.3.1992.
18. *PCF - Section centrale d'éducation: Ecole fédérale, septembre 1972*. Material supplied by A. Vagneron, Besançon, France.
19. Interview with Bernard Pudal, 3.4.1992.
20. Interview with Jean-Marie Argelès, 8.9.1991.
21. *Cahiers du communisme*, no. 4, avril, 1972, p. 74.
22. Written interview with Raymond Constans, 31.5.1991.

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23. According to ROBRIEUX, "*dans le sillage de Maurice Thorez, il [Fajon] est un des soutiens inconditionnels du conservatisme*". See ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome IV, op. cit.*, p. 209.
 24. *Cahiers du communisme*, no. 11, novembre, 1975, pp. 4-7.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 26. *Les principes de la politique du Parti communiste français* (PCF, Paris, 1976).
 27. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 248. See Table 1.4, p.33 for figures of the social composition of the Politbureau.
 28. Source: *Archives de l'Ecole nationale* du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 363. A wider definition does not consider Eurocommunism as a uniquely European phenomenon, and even includes the Japanese CP in this widespread process which is associated more extensively with advanced industrial democracy. See LANGE & VANNICELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 365. Evidently the declaration was deemed important since 10 million copies were distributed!
 35. It was not until 1982 that the speech was published in full by the PCF historian Roger Martelli, "*1956: le choc du Xxème Congrès du PCUS*", Eds. Sociales, 1982. (See Chapter 1, note 35.)
 36. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 366.
 37. Programme of the four-month central school March-July 1977. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
 38. Programme of the four-month central school February-June 1978. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
 39. Philippe Dbiblio was one of the last PCF students to go to the International Cadre School in Moscow in 1973-74. Dbiblio had already been through the party school system in France after joining the PCF in 1961. After brief spells as a party journalist in various PCF publications, including *L'Humanité* 1978-83, Dbiblio gave up his position as a party functionary and by 1986, he no longer held any responsibilities in the Party. Dbiblio's "Moscow experience" is described in CARDOZE, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-16.
 40. Programme of the four-month central school February-June 1980. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
 41. BELL & CRIDDLE, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
 42. Interview with Jean-Marie Argelès, 8.9.1991.
 43. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 388.
 44. Source: Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
 45. The treatment meted out by the PCF's workerist leadership to the Paris federation in particular was

a perfect illustration of its fear of losing the communist political culture and identity. The crisis of the federation in 1978 was linked to the general unrest amongst the party intellectuals, all the more so as the federation presented a physiognomy which was quite different from the rest of the CP federations. With its 38 000 members in 1978 (of whom 80% had joined since 1968) and 1600 cells it was the PCF's largest and most important federation and a true reflection of the Paris region in terms of its socioprofessional composition, with a low working-class representation and older than average membership. In 1977, 48% of the Parisian Communists were in liberal professions or in middle or senior management, 25% were teachers and the members' educational levels were well above those of the rest of the Party. Only 13% were workers. The federal secretary Jean-Marie Argelès left his post to mark his opposition to the leadership's "anti-intellectual attitude" and a little later, Henri Fiszbin, the leader of the federation, resigned for "health reasons". By 1979 the Paris federation had lost 4000 members and become a marginal element in the capital's political life. According to Courtois, the solution chosen by the PCF leadership "led to its defence of its old values, orthodoxy and *centralité ouvrière, révolutionnaire et communiste* - and to isolation. It was an ideological choice but also showed the leadership's incapacity to foster any other identity but that which they had always known themselves and which always ensured their own upward mobility". (See Courtois in *Communisme*, 15-16, p. 69 and Courtois & Lazar, *op. cit.*, pp. 384-86, and Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.168.)

46. YSMAL, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
47. Source: Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. WRIGHT, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
51. ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome III, op. cit.*, p. 143.
52. Interview with Henri Martin, 31.3.1992.
53. Thus, Georges Marchais' profession was always given as *métallurgiste* although he had not exercised it since 1951 when he became a full-time CGT official. See ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome IV, op. cit.*, p. 407.
54. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 424. See also TABLE 1.3, The PCF's social composition 1954-1979, p. 33.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 248. See also TABLE 1.4, The sociological composition of the PCF's Politbureau 1947-1990, p. 35.
58. Reference to *Voyage à l'intérieur du Parti communiste* by HARRIS, A, & DE SEDOUY, A. (Seuil, 1974).
59. Source: Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
60. Marcel Gauterie in *France Nouvelle*, 24.2. - 2.3.1975.
61. SPIRE, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-6.
62. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
63. An excellent example of this is the elated description by Albert COÏC (technician and trade union secretary at Thomson in Calvados) of his confrontation with his boss after being taught

at a party school in 1975: *"L'école m'a donné un élément de réflexion. Quand j'étais en face du patron de Thomson, au niveau du comité central d'entreprise, j'avais un certain nombre de choses à la tête pour le piéger; comment formuler les revendications ... Cela permet de devenir autre chose qu'un pion, quelqu'un qui a envie de gérer sa propre vie. Enfin, l'école m'a permis de mieux comprendre les idées que j'avais choisies."* (Interview with Albert Coïc, Caen, 18.6.1991)

64. SPIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

65. Ibid. pp. 63-66.

CHAPTER 6

1981-90: NOTHING LEFT BUT 'BEING THERE'

The remorseless decline of the PCF provides the setting for the final chapter of this study. The planners of the education programme faced a challenging and exhausting task in keeping abreast with the shifts in the party strategy engendered by major developments at home and abroad (the PCF in government and in opposition; the arrival of the perestroika and glasnost programmes; and the collapse of Communism). A study of their response will form the first section of this chapter. Second, we will continue our analysis of the sociological composition of the Party's central school students and ascertain to what extent the main trends, which emerged in the 1970s (see Chapter 5), i.e. the "deproletarianisation" of the one-month schools and the over-representation of workers in the four-month schools, continued during this decade. As the Party declined, so too the education system ran down: student numbers dwindled and fewer schools were held during this decade. One reason was that the PCF's student recruitment strategy based on the now shrinking party and trade union membership was no longer able to produce the customary numbers of trainees; however, that was only a part of the picture as there were also other causes which we will examine. Finally, we, too, shall attempt to link theory with practice by examining the trajectory and personal experience of a communist militant who was trained in the Party's central schools in the last years of the 1980s, more than half a century after the education system was set up, and by giving the author's own eye witness account of the "classroom reality" in the Party's central school in the early 1990s.

Political education in a tail-spin

*"Le PCF au pouvoir ... des socialistes"*²

We noted in Chapter 1 that the PCF returned to government in 1981 for the first time in 34 years in the most unfavourable conditions possible after the Socialist landslide victory. The PCF's dilemma was how to stage a new *retour stratégique* to ensure that

the period of left government would lead to a transition towards socialism rather than turn out to be a mere "social-democratic experience".³ On the face of it, the Communists had achieved what they had set out to do: they had become a party of government, but had to prove that they were up to their new responsibilities while retaining their traditional role as the *parti de luttes*.

On top of the change in the PCF's political situation there was the "*grande question*" of the period. This concerned the formation of a new, coherent communist strategy, necessary with its embracing of the concept of *socialisme à la française* and its renunciation of the dictatorship of proletariat (in 1976), of the term 'Marxism-Leninism', and the notion of an "official" theory.⁴ This obviously implied far-reaching consequences for the party education system: the whole concept of communist education had been to teach Marxism-Leninism, whereas now the key issue⁵ was that it was no longer enough to present a doctrine; political strategy was to be formed on the basis of changes in the "real" by clarifying these changes via Marxism, which itself had been "set in movement". This became the main plank in the party education of scientific socialism. With the Socialists and Communists in power, the PCF considered that its long-term strategy of "socialism in the French style" had become a realistic goal and thus targets in political education were to be defined on that basis. On a concrete level, this meant that instructors had to be schooled in the new approach through workforce training courses and educational lectures on national and international current affairs, along with special nine-day "catch-up" courses to clarify the new thinking.⁶

However, in the run-up to the 24th Congress in February 1982, the main topic of discussion was the question of the PCF's electoral setbacks in the 1981 presidential and legislative elections. These setbacks were generally attributed to the disintegration of the Left Union and the Party's subsequent attacks on the PS, and the PCF's immobilism in the face of the great changes which had taken place in French society since the 1960s.⁷ In his five-hour congress speech, Georges Marchais' official explanation for the Party's poor performance was however "*le retard historique de 1956*" and its consequences. Marchais also set out the party policy to follow (which did not greatly differ from the 23rd congress line except that with communist ministers now in government, criticism

of Mitterrand was naturally muted and the pro-Soviet line considerably modified), namely "*le socialisme à la française*" as mentioned above, i.e. a society based on justice, new economic growth, freedom and a cultural renaissance. The methods to be advanced in order to achieve this goal were the extension of democracy and continuation of the class struggle with workers, *employés*, the ITC, intellectuals, farmers, women and young people (i.e. "*la majorité écrasante du peuple*"); the development of international relations, which would focus on the struggle for peace and solidarity with ruling Communist Parties; and finally, a reconceptualisation of the role of the Party. The Party's attitude to the socialist government was "positive", and the Communist ministers' task was to ensure that serious problems such as unemployment and the economic crisis, were tackled. There were many new opportunities on offer for the Party: a "social-democratic experiment" was not self-evident - it would be "possible to implement another policy than that of managing the crisis in the interests of big business. [...] the class struggle did not come to an end on 10th May!"⁸

These main themes of the 24th Congress again formed the body of the political study programmes. The issue of *le retard historique* was dealt with in the central school study programmes: "For two decades, our Party has been giving 'old answers' - we did not take advantage of the new conditions created in the international communist movement by the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Not until the 22nd and 23rd Congress did the PCF provide 'radically new responses'."⁹

The other important study topic was the Party's new strategy in the changed situation following the May elections: how to combine the role of a revolutionary party in struggle with that of a party of government. This required a great deal of time and effort at all levels of party education as a considerable amount of adaptation was called for from a party which had been in constant opposition since 1947. As a junior partner in government, the PCF had to work out how to be "a Communist Party of the masses", "a Communist Party ever more firmly anchored to the centre of gravity of the popular movement" and "a Communist Party with an intense political life that would render it better able to play its political role."¹⁰

A new programme for the four-month central school came out in September 1982. It set out to clarify the key questions of the new strategy based on the outlines given at the 24th Congress. First, it was confirmed that "for the first time, socialism was on the agenda in France", not as a distant and abstract concept but as *réponse concrète* to French society's pressing problems. Second, the party strategy concerning the socialist countries, the struggle for peace and disarmament, national liberation movements, the international crisis of capitalism and European integration had to be explained to the students. The third main theme was the PCF's aim to realise a type of socialism which would be democratic and self-managing (*autogestionnaire*). The final point concerned the Party itself, as the party of revolution and of government, and how to balance these roles. The new programme was supported by 11 lectures on Marxist philosophy to provide the theoretical framework for the practical aspects.¹¹

By September 1983, the study programmes were supplemented by an assessment of the PCF's first two years in government, "*Bilan et perspectives gouvernementales: Rapports gouvernement-travailleurs-citoyens*", the balance sheet of the Left government. Since the PCF had been participating in government, "justice had advanced, well-being had advanced, democracy had advanced".¹² In addition, the socialist countries "continued to advance: in these countries, there was no question of zero or negative growth, ...production had gone up." To highlight the advances in the socialist countries, a detailed study of the USSR (photocopied from "*Histoire du temps présent 1939-82*", by Serge Wolikow, and published by *Editions sociales*) was included with the training programme for further study.

"Seul contre tous!"

The strategy of the "two sides of the Communist coin" - the leadership on the outside keeping a watchful eye on the government policy ("*un soutien critique*") and the Communist ministers on the inside bound by *solidarité gouvernementale* (agreed in the governmental contract with the PS in June 1981¹³) - proved more problematic at the time of the PS's austerity U-turn in the spring of 1983. By March 1984, the Communist ministers' position was becoming untenable in the face of the government's plan to

restructure the steel industry (there was a violent strike in the Lorraine steel works which the PCF felt duty-bound to support). The crunch came with the European elections in June 1984, when the PCF only gained 11.2 per cent of the vote (compared with 20.5 per cent in 1979) against 21 per cent for the PS (and 11 per cent for the *Front national*).

The departure from the government of the four Communist ministers enabled the PCF to return to the "hard line" as it was no longer bound by governmental solidarity and could become a radical opposition party.¹⁴ The new line was ratified by the 25th Congress in February 1985. This time the leadership met with strong internal opposition: already in October 1984, when the draft resolution was voted at a Central Committee meeting, six members had abstained from voting and five federations also rejected the draft.¹⁵ Criticism was voiced publicly regarding the functioning of the Party (democratic centralism); the leadership's "unilateral" analysis of the decline of the PCF and the apportioning of the blame for the failure of the Left Union entirely on the PS; and the *bilan globalement positif* of the socialist countries.

The 25th Congress critically reassessed the last 25 years of political action and declared that the entire Left Union period had been an enormous mistake. The Party also gave its own analysis of the Communist decline since 1981: "*le retard pris*" in analysing and understanding French society was the main culprit which manifested itself under three guises. First, there was the strategic *retard* of the Party's inaction from 1956 onwards ("*une interprétation restrictive*" of the CPSU's 20th Congress by Maurice Thorez and Waldeck Rochet). Secondly, the political *retard* in the PCF's analysis of the Fifth Republic was cited. Finally, there was *le retard institutionnel* as the Party had failed to understand the significance of the new mechanisms of government introduced in 1958-62 and the presidentialisation of the régime. Thus, adhering to the Common Programme had in fact "reinforced the perverse effects of the institutions" by forcing the PCF to "fade" behind the PS (in particular during the presidential election of 1974).¹⁶ Any idea of rebuilding the alliance with the Socialists was thus officially buried and the PCF's participation in the two Mauroy governments was wiped off the record.¹⁷

The other principal themes arising from the 25th Congress were the limitation of the powers of the President of the Republic, job creation, a greater degree of social justice and a more democratic society. To achieve these goals, a new "tool" was set up, the NRPM (*Nouveau rassemblement populaire majoritaire*) of all those who "*ne se retrouveraient pas dans la notion de gauche et qui ont néanmoins de puissantes raisons de prendre leur place dans un mouvement diversifié de lutte pour le progrès*".¹⁸ However, since the *rassemblement* appeared to be based on little else but "*bouffées de colère et de désespoir*" in order to defend the poor and victims of hard times¹⁹ it created a strategy around a "*cartel de mécontents*".²⁰ This increased the ambiguities in the PCF's ideological image and, inevitably, emphasised its *identité ouvrière* in the most classic way.

The programme planners again had the task of presenting the repackaged, tired old ideas to the students; in fact, the study programmes were beginning to mirror more and more singularly the Party's lack of a coherent strategy. Even so, the PCF had hardly time to implement its training plans for the new party line before another blow fell. The 1986 legislative elections produced the worst ever Communist result during the Fifth Republic, 9.79 per cent of the votes cast, a result which was just ahead of the National Front and back to the 1924 level (9.5%).

To keep abreast with the fast-moving events the political study programmes were hastily supplemented by the leadership's analyses and explanations of what had so disastrously gone wrong. An interview with Jean-Claude Gayssot in the Party journal *Révolution* was included in the central school reading list.²¹ Following the example set by Marchais, Gayssot reiterated that the Party was now aware of the damaging effects of presidentialism, bipolarisation and the institutional problems which "seriously distorted political debate". The PCF was also "suffering from a formidable anticommunist campaign" whose aim was to discredit the Party's image.

"Orthodoxe et enfermé dans ses certitudes place Colonel-Fabien"

The severity of the electoral defeat had left the Party stunned, and the two-year gap between the 1986 legislative elections and the 1988 presidential election was not enough time for the PCF to plan any coherent strategy. Nor did the worsening internal divisions allow the Party to fully exploit the *mariage forcé* between the socialist President and his conservative Prime Minister: all the PCF could do was to continue to attack the PS and Mitterrand as "objective allies of the right" while simultaneously continuing its guard dog role and proclaiming its own desire for left unity.²² The watchword, "*le PCF seul contre tous*" confirmed the Party's return to its pre-1986 strategy of "*défense des défavorisés ... tous azimuts*" in an effort to recover its tribune role.²³ It was also proof of an ever growing ideological vacuum and increasing incoherence.

The 1986 election results had also intensified the PCF's internal strife. The *rénovateurs* published in *Le Monde* (23-24.4.1986) a petition signed by 3000 people demanding that an Extraordinary 26th Congress be held. Many municipal cadres and party officials at departmental level joined the intellectuals in their demands. Thus, dissidence was becoming increasingly a conflict between the central leadership, "*orthodoxe et enfermé dans ses certitudes place du Colonel-Fabien*", and the periphery.²⁴ Not surprisingly, the leadership ran into trouble in trying to silence opposition in the run-up to the 26th Congress in December 1987. As before, the complaints of the *contestataires* focused on the Party's organisational principle of democratic centralism, and its strategy towards the PS since 1977.

As previously, the 26th Congress Resolution also bluntly condemned the 25 years of alliance strategy from 1962 onwards as "negative and damaging" with the exceptions of the Champigny Manifesto in 1968 and "some months of 1981 and 1982".²⁵ The Party's collective memory wished to retain nothing of the Communist experience as a *parti de gouvernement*; rather, the PCF was to be considered the only bastion of resistance in French politics, different in all respects - honesty, truth and probity - "*un instrument nouveau, un parti révolutionnaire*".²⁶

The Resolution also dealt with the changes in the Soviet Union where the perestroika begun by Mikhail Gorbachev was "*une véritable révolution dans la révolution*". The

PCF pledged to support the work of "transformation and improvement" in which the Socialist countries were involved. Gorbachev's report presented during the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Russian Revolution was commented upon favourably: it had shown clearly the Soviet Union's "indisputable achievements recorded on economic, social, political and scientific levels". In analysing the "causes of difficulties and delays which had accumulated, the errors committed", the CPSU had begun an in-depth analysis of the history of the USSR which could only lead to a profound and coherent movement of transformation: *"Son objectif n'est pas de faire moins de socialisme, mais d'en faire plus."*²⁷

The most interesting development in the study programmes was now the theme covering the new situation in the USSR with Gorbachev in power. In 1985 - after the temporary silence of the training programmes on the USSR and other socialist countries which mirrored the party line during the Eurocommunist period - the party schools were still teaching that the "existence of the many socialist states is a decisive asset".²⁸ This statement was supported by a long list of their social achievements; their role as a counterweight to imperialism, their economic power and their support for nations struggling for independence were also evoked. Yet, there had also been problems, and the Party did not "intend to dress up nor blacken the reality". As to the "development crisis" of socialism, it was not "comparable to the crisis of capitalism which is a crisis of the social system itself".

Gorbachev's accession to power in 1985 created a political and ideological dilemma for the PCF, in particular as it caught the Party at its lowest ebb since the 1930s. The unfolding of the new situation in the USSR was followed attentively by the French Communists who hoped to see a new dynamic communist leadership succeed the Chernenko-Andropov gerontocracy and prove the supremacy of Soviet socialism. Lectures and discussions regarding perestroika and glasnost began to make their appearance at all levels of the political education system from 1986 onwards. In February 1986, Gorbachev accorded an exclusive interview to *L'Humanité* (4.2.1986), and the entire account of this was added to the central school study list. The interview featured pertinent glasnost-probing questions such as *"Mais il y a encore des queues*

*pour l'approvisionnement, chez vous?" ("Yes," replied Gorbachev), "Le Parti communiste est-il, en URSS, 'la courroie de transmission' de l'Etat?" and "La fin de la guerre en Afghanistan - et donc le retrait des troupes soviétiques - peuvent-ils être raisonnablement envisagés dans un avenir proche?"*²⁹

In 1987, the 26th Congress sang the praises of Gorbachev and declared its total support for perestroika. The four-month central school held in the spring of 1987³⁰ included a detailed 12-page "*Brève chronologie 1985-87*" covering the first two years of Gorbachev's régime and the most important dates of his life and career, giving a virtual day-by-day account of the two-year period. A year later, the PCF's tone was changing as Gorbachev's reforms started to reveal the very backwardness and poverty of Soviet society that the PCF had been trying to conceal. The Party now declared that perestroika was not "an obligatory example" for other countries and the Politbureau of the PCF was warning the CPSU against Gorbachev's "adventurism".³¹ The official line of the party schools was however to provide facts for debates and discussions, and in 1989, the central school study programmes included a background reading list consisting of an article by Gérard Streiff "*URSS: un changement ample, profond et durable*",³² another by Maxime Gremetz "*Quoi de neuf dans le domaine international?*"³³, and an article published in *L'Humanité*, "*La perestroïka à plein régime*", based on Gorbachev's own report on the situation in the USSR.

Despite the PCF's see-saw attitude to perestroika the rather factual way of "teaching" about it is worth noting. It is however impossible to know how the theme was treated during the discussions and debates that followed, or how the teachers and students came to terms with the fact that most of what had been declared "*bilan globalement positif*" was indeed far from it - and that the truth was coming from the horse's own mouth, i.e. the Secretary-General of the CPSU. The Marchais leadership tried its best to keep the lid on: in the autumn of 1989, when the Soviet Union was in serious danger of breaking up and the reform programmes seemed to be challenging the very principles of socialism, Marchais still felt compelled to declare that the PCF, having already rejected the universal model of socialism, was in no way obliged to emulate innovations from outside: "*Ce qui se passe en Union Soviétique ne peut*

constituer un modèle pour les autres partis communistes; c'est spécifique à l'Union Soviétique."³⁴ The four short years of perestroika had in no way prepared the PCF - or any other communist party, for that matter - for the demise of Communism.

"Il n'est pire aveugle que celui qui ne veut voir"

The 6.7 per cent of the vote collected by André Lajoinie at the first ballot of the 1988 presidential election was the worst result at the polls in the PCF's entire history. Yet, despite Marchais's statement in February 1988 that the balance sheet of the Mitterrand *septennat* was "negative and catastrophic", the Communist leadership supported Mitterrand - albeit *au bout des lèvres* - at the second ballot in order to block the victory of the right (Chirac and Le Pen).³⁵ The PCF's score (11.1%) in the snap elections of 5th and 12th June surprised the pollsters who were expecting an even worse result than in 1986, especially as the majoritarian electoral system had been restored. But the PCF's renaissance was as deceiving as it was circumstantial: the record abstention rate (34%) favoured the Communists; the complaisant and over-confident Socialist campaign backfired disastrously; and the PCF's "*maires au secours!*" strategy - the running of popular Communist mayors as candidates - paid off.³⁶ In any case, the Communist remission proved to be short-lived: in the March municipal and June European elections in 1989 the Party suffered further setbacks. The PCF's hopes of rallying to its banner some of those dissatisfied with the new Socialist policy under Michel Rocard, "*ouverture vers le centre*", were soon dashed; and with its 27 deputies, the PCF - despite its threats to the contrary - was more or less obliged to fall in line with Rocard's minority government on most issues for fear of early elections. By this time, the extraordinary crisis of Communism in the East was casting its shadow on the remains of Communist credibility.

It was against this backdrop that the PCF held its 27th Congress in December 1990. With unsurpassed aptness, Georges Marchais felt obliged to ask at the beginning of his Report, "*Qu'est-ce que le Parti communiste français? [...] A quoi sert-il?*". In the Resolution, the failure of socialism was tackled in a lengthy explanation, which was taken up by the party education system to form the basis for the "new" teaching. The

starting point of the study programmes was that the socialist countries had enjoyed indisputable earlier success, but the rot had set in with the “hijacking” of socialism by Stalin, *“une perversion monstrueuse du socialisme, du marxisme, du rôle et de la conception même du Parti qui fut le stalinisme”*. Stalinism developed first of all in the Soviet Union and then spread its ideological and theoretical ravages to the entire Communist movement. Why and how did that come about? Firstly, according to the party analysis, the socialist societies, being *“sociétés de transition”*, should have moved towards the new and fought against the old, but in the socialist countries this process was blocked by the leadership which refused to complete the destalinisation process. Secondly, the working class - the original revolutionary class - was deprived of any possibility to participate effectively in the running of the state and society. Thirdly, a vanguard communist party had ceased to exist in these countries; the Communist Parties had merged into the state and had transformed themselves into “super-administrations”. Finally, the socialist societies did not just collapse by themselves: the anti-socialist forces in those countries were helped politically and materially by capitalist countries. The conclusion was that the *débâcle* in the East might have “winged” Marxism and socialism, but it had not fatally disabled them - what had taken place, however, was that they had been liberated from Stalinist institutionalisation (which, moreover, the PCF had been “continually condemning” in its consecutive congresses since 1976: *“des pratiques et des défauts relevant du passé stalinien”*, although the Party could not be held blameless: *“Il ya eu là, incontestablement, de notre part, un défaut d'analyse et d'appréciation.”*).³⁷

The explanation of what had gone wrong, and why, did not make it any easier to reconstruct a basis for the new study programmes. The question concerning the relevance and *raison d'être* of a party education system based on principles which had been so profoundly rejected had to be addressed and the problem of “what does socialism mean now and how is it to be taught” had to be dealt with. At the Central School, however, there were no surprises as Lucien Bossu, the director of the one-month central school in 1990, based his thoughts and the teaching programme firmly on the analysis of the 27th Congress:³⁸ the failure of the socialist countries did not mean the failure of socialism - had the Party thought that, it would have changed its name and

strategy. The “disaster” in Eastern Europe had not removed the need for politics whose aim was to replace capitalism, although, admittedly, it had “demonstrated the need for new approaches and organisational methods”. Consequently, the PCF would no longer offer “*une grande théorie*” with ready-made solutions, but had instead formulated a new approach, “*pousser jusqu’au bout le nouveau qui se dessine dans la société actuelle et que le carcan du capitalisme empêche de grandir: justice, liberté, paix.*” The context and form were to be decided by the people themselves. Thus, between capitalism and bureaucratic socialism, there was another way: the French idea of socialism, “*socialisme autogestionnaire à la française*”. For this, as Bossu put it, there was no pre-established “*schéma*”, no “*petit livre rouge*”, no “*sauveur suprême*”; rather, the emphasis had to be on letting the people set the pace of the movement towards socialism. The PCF, then, would be in the role of a vanguard party: “*passer devant les gens, mais avec les gens pour que ça change vraiment*”. With the PCF leadership continuing to set the parameters of the political training programmes, the education system once again presented a mirror image of the Party with the programme planners groping their way toward the new decade.

Epilogue: “*Nous et l’URSS*”

The abortive Moscow coup in August 1991 left the PCF protesting even more vigorously and indignantly its independence and separate identity from the CPSU. The autumn of 1991 was devoted to frantic activity at all levels of the Party to regain a semblance of credibility in time for the March 1992 regional elections. From October, a programme of hundreds of open *débats* (covering the whole country) for party members, sympathisers, non-communists and ex-communists alike aimed “*pour faire connaître la politique communiste*” with key words such as *liberté, écoute, échange d’idées*. A big test of public opinion was the annual *Fête de L’Humanité* which took place in Paris just a few weeks after the failed *coup*. The jubilant and relieved PCF³⁹ declared a near record attendance (640 000 against 650 000 in 1990 according to *Le Nouvel Observateur* of 19-25th September). The Party further emphasised its traditional values and national profile by celebrating, on 20th October, the 50th Anniversary of Châteaubriant with Georges Marchais - defiantly, in the face of predictable and

understandable opposition from both communist and non-communist *anciens résistants* - delivering a speech to honour the memory of the 27 mainly communist *résistants* executed by the Nazis in 1941. More defensive justification followed in October 1991, when *Cahiers du communisme* published a special edition "*Nous et l'URSS*" with a keynote article by Maxime Gremetz which confirmed the importance of the 22nd Congress and the correctness of the analyses and political choices of the 27th Congress (the article subsequently became an update of the situation in party schools). The complete texts of two critical and indignant letters (by the CPSU and PCF respectively) exchanged between the two parties in 1977 were also published (and studied at the central schools) in order to prove that the PCF had not "*aveuglément aligné sur le PCUS*". So too were long extracts of a 1989 discussion between Marchais and Gorbachev, in order to convince the nation of the PCF's unconditional and loyal support, "*dès le début*", for perestroika.⁴⁰

Still solid in their certainties, the training programme planners took to heart the tatters of the re-confirmed and reinforced party line whilst preparing the rest of the year's schools: "*... notre idée communiste s'inspire de notre histoire et des découvertes du marxisme. Ces questions, au coeur de l'enseignement dans les écoles du parti, sont plus que jamais nécessaires pour aider tous les militants à débattre. Cela nous amène à intensifier encore notre travail d'éducation.*"⁴¹ "Defend the status quo" as an epitaph would not go amiss.

The lean years of cadre training

In Chapter 5, we established an accurate picture of the student population of the one- and four-month central schools during the 1974-80 period. Unlike Henri Martin, his successors at the central school were not always such meticulous record keepers. Each new central school director was "allowed" to make his own mark on his term of office, and this was also reflected in the way student records were kept.⁴² The lack of consistency creates some difficulty in calculating student numbers and, to a certain extent, in interpreting the information available; however, it is possible to establish the

main trends of the period. The details of the student population are presented in tabular form below.

One-month central schools 1981-90

TABLE 6.1 One-month central schools 1981-1990 (generally 10 schools a year; no. of schools with details available shown in brackets)

	Joined the PCF	1981 (5)	1982 (9)	1983 (6)	1984 (7)	1985 (5)	1986 (9)	1987 (8)	1988 (4)	1989 (5)	1990 (9)	Total	%
No. of Students		161	265	135	256	86	195	199	132	105	157	1691	
Women		36	73	37	63	31	46	53	38	22	37	436	25.8
Average Age		31.5	32.5	-	33	-	32	34	33	35	35	Av. age 33	
Workers		47	63	-	52	-	37	46	17	10	21	293	17.3
<i>Employés</i>		37	56	-	36	-	32	22	14	7	12	216	12.8
ITC		16	36	-	34	-	21	14	14	17	20	172	10.2
Teachers / Researchers		24	38	-	33	-	18	22	5	16	12	168	9.9
	1945- 1955	1	3	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.2
	1956- 1968	30	62	-	43	-	30	24	11	12	14	226	13.4
	1969- 1979	101	188	-	195	-	110	106	59	52	75	886	52.4
	1980-	2	6	-	14	-	54	46	43	13	51	229	13.5

Source: Calculated from archival data of *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français* (Draveil, Essonne)

Data on 62 one-month schools held in 1981-90 show that the total number of students in these schools was 1691 of whom 436 were women (25.8% - a 2% increase on the 1974-80 figures). This provides a marked contrast with the shorter 1974-80 period (see Chapter 5), with a total number of 3263 students (776 women). Student numbers therefore decreased by half; in fact, there were 50% fewer students in the final decade under study even though more schools were held. Two examples further demonstrate this huge drop. In 1977, as many as 627 students participated in the eight schools held, whereas in 1987 the number had dropped to 199 (also eight schools). In 1980, there were 414 students in all the ten schools held; ten years later there were only 168 in the ten schools held.

The students' socio-professional composition also changed: the one-month central school student population in 1981-90 showed more variety than that of the 1970s. Workers represented only 17.3% of all students (down from 28.8% in 1974-80) and *employés* 12.8%, whereas the *ITC* category and teachers/researchers accounted for 10.2% and 9.9% respectively. Compared with the 1974-80 period, all four main categories had gone down and together represented just over half (50.2%) of the total number of the students. The rest of the students were an extremely heterogeneous lot, made up of a variety of professions and trades that did not fit any of the four main categories: amongst them were nurses, academics, economists, farmers, tax collectors, housewives, designers, social workers, cleaners, those unemployed and *sans profession* (as well as one sculptor).

Based on the information of 51 one-month schools, the average age of the students was 33 years which was four years higher than in 1974-80. This may reflect the fact that the PCF now had difficulty in attracting young people, a pattern already noted in the various analyses of election results. Regarding the political generations, in line with the 1974-80 period, it was sometimes difficult to find consistency in the way that dates for joining the Party had been recorded and as before, this led to some overlapping. However, the available evidence suggests that most students (52.4%) had joined the PCF in 1969-1979 (13.5% had joined after 1979).

TABLE 6.2 Four-month central schools 1981-1990 (generally 2 schools a year; no. of schools with details available shown in brackets)

	Joined the PCF	198 1 (1)	198 2 (2)	198 3 (2)	198 4 (1)	198 5 (1)	198 6 (2)	198 7 (1)	198 8 (0)	198 9 (1)	199 0 (2)	Total	%
No. of students		24	31	42	18	16	54	14	-	21	24	244	
Women		2	8	2	2	2	7	4	-	-	4	31	7.9
Average age		33	32.5	-	35.5	37	35	36	-	39	33.5	Av. age 35	
Workers		14	14	17	10	6	20	6	-	7	7	101	41.4
<i>Employés</i>		5	6	9	1	3	6	2	-	2	1	35	14.3
ITC		3	4	4	5	6	4	-	-	5	2	33	13.5
Teachers / Researcher s		1	5	3	2	-	3	2	-	-	2	18	7.4
	1945- 1955	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	1956- 1968	9	4	-	8	6	8	3	-	4	2	44	18.0
	1969- 1979	15	27	-	10	10	17	9	-	15	16	119	48.8
	1980-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	3	6	2.5

Source: Calculated from archival data of *Ecole nationale du Parti communiste français* (Draveil, Essonne)

Details of 13 four-month schools with a total of 244 students were available. This compares with details of 13 schools in 1974-80 with students numbering 431, and again demonstrates a significant drop in student numbers. In 1980, there were 68 students on the two four-month courses, but ten years later in 1990, only 24 attended. According to figures given by Henri Martin, in the final five-year period 1986-90, only seven four-month schools with 131 students were held (the normal figure was two schools a year); this meant, on average, only 18.7 students per school.

Although the percentage of workers in the 1981-90 student population in four-month schools was down by 5% to 41.4% they were nevertheless still in clear majority compared with the *employés* (14.3%), *ITCs* (13.5%) and teachers/researchers (7.4%).

As in the one-month schools, the number of students outside the four main categories had increased and represented almost a quarter of all four-month school students (from 19.7% in 1974-80 to 24%). It is however clear that the bulk of the top leadership was still being groomed from “old-style material” in which the working class dominated.

Women accounted for only 12.7% of the four-month school students, a drop of 5% since 1974-80. As in the one-month schools, the average age of the students had risen, from 32 to 33.5 years. The overwhelming majority of the students had joined the PCF during the 1969-79 period (48.8%) although 44 (18%) were pre-1968 while a mere 2.5% had joined after 1979.

To a large extent, the above analyses confirm the trends which emerged from the 1974-80 student details. The “deproletarianisation” of the one-month schools continued as the four main categories remained fairly evenly distributed. This was also reflected by the socio-professional composition of the middle-level leadership participating in the PCF’s 27th Congress held in St. Ouen in 1990 when 1019 party delegates were interviewed.⁴³ According to the survey, almost half (47%) of the delegates were workers and *employés* (23% and 24% respectively; the percentage of working-class delegates had gone down from 36.9% in the 25th Congress in 1985 and from 46.6% in 1976). Interestingly, the congress survey also revealed that, whatever their stated activity, 60% of the 1990 Congress delegates felt that they were working class (37% of managers and intellectuals thought so, as did 27% of graduates). Moreover, a huge majority of the delegates (84%) thought - in 1990 - that the expression “*parti de la classe ouvrière*” was still appropriate; likewise, “*la lutte des classes*” was still a topical issue for 94% of the party delegates. However, as pointed out above, in the one-month schools the novelty for this final decade under study was the growth of the “disparate” group consisting of students from a variety of professions. This suggests that in theory at any rate, the middle-level leadership positions were accessible to individuals coming from outside the traditional socio-professional categories.

The other side of the coin remained virtually unchanged: the four-month schools still held firm against any serious threat of “deproletarianisation”. The students’ socio-

professional composition continued to reflect that of the 1974-80 period with workers in clear majority which mirrored Marchais's working-class dominated leadership and its continuing policy of *centralité ouvrière*. The Party therefore remained well on course for ensuring the future leadership's social purity and to retaining the reins in safe hands.

Fewer Indians, fewer Chiefs?

The most dramatic fact to emerge from analysis of the student population was the huge reduction in the number of students in party schools. Despite the efforts made by the Party, the numbers of participants attending both the one-month and four-month schools continued to dwindle throughout the 1980s. This was yet another manifestation of the serious problems of the PCF in all areas of party activity: decline in membership, decline in militancy and increase in dissidence; all factors which in themselves also contributed to the reduction in student numbers and which therefore merit examination. According to Courtois and Lazar, the Party's membership fell from 520 000 in 1978 to 330 000⁴⁴ in 1987; Ranger claims that by the end of 1985, the number of members could not have exceeded 230 000⁴⁵. The membership also changed composition. Once the Left Union started to run into trouble and eventually broke up, new recruits came mainly from "*les couches les plus pauvres de la population, sur la base d'un discours aux accents misérabilistes*" .⁴⁶ They were no longer representatives of the "new middle classes" but *inactifs* and people from the lowest paid categories. The problem was that the new type of recruit was unlikely to provide good quality cadre training material for the Party's future needs.⁴⁷

Militant activity is extremely difficult to measure accurately, even more so than membership levels, with militancy manifesting itself in varying degrees of action and commitment.⁴⁸ However, one can deduce from the PCF's inability, from the 1980s on, to mobilise discontented sectors of the nation around the ideas and policies of the Party that Communist militancy was also on the wane. This was evident from the slowing down or simple disappearance of the PCF's front organisations (peasants, war veterans, tenants, etc.) by the beginning of the 1980s.⁴⁹ By the 1990s it was becoming clear that the PCF was losing its grip on the CGT (still a major force in French trade unionism

despite its own serious decline from 2.3 million active members in 1978 to about 800 000 in 1987⁵⁰) as well as the main teachers' union, the FEN (which subsequently split in 1993). There was also a noticeable reduction in the militant presence of the Party - once so impressive and all pervasive - evidenced in the virtual demise of door-to-door selling, posters on the walls and the sellers of *L'Humanité-Dimanche*.⁵¹

A further indication of the PCF's problems was the dramatic increase in dissidence since 1978, first mainly manifested amongst Communist intellectuals, both inside and outside the Party. Incidents had been multiplying since 1978.⁵² In 1979-80, there was the crisis of the Paris federation; in 1980-81 a movement brought together Communists, Socialists and Trotskyists with demands for unity; in 1981-82 Fiszbin's *Rencontres communistes hebdomadaires* formed a base for an opposition group; the Party's poor results in the 1984 European elections caused further upheaval which reached even the Central Committee as les *renovateurs communistes* were set up in the aftermath, with the aim of renovating the PCF from within. After the May 1988 presidential election, les *reconstructeurs communistes* were born: their objective was to reconstruct the Party from within when the *renovateurs* had already left. Finally, les *refondateurs* made their appearance towards the end of 1989 led by Charles Fiterman and Claude Poperen. The increase in dissidence meant that many potential party school students had in fact joined the dissident groups and were no longer available for political training.

It would be simple enough to conclude that fewer members and fewer militants equalled fewer students. But there was more: student recruitment had traditionally taken place mainly amongst the traditional working-class members of the Party, and it was this category which was in numerical decline in the 1980s. The problem was clearly pointed out by Fernand Laporte, the *doyen* of the federal committee of Isère and municipal counsellor in Grenoble: "*Je mets aussi en cause le système de recrutement des cadres du Parti qui s'opère pour l'essentiel dans une couche sociale déterminée: une fraction de la classe ouvrière, qui conserve tout son poids dans les directions alors que dans la société, ce poids relatif a diminué.*"⁵³ In other interviews carried out among 60 party leaders at different levels, all those interviewed also criticised the way communist cadres were selected and trained. According to one Central Committee member, the main

selection criterion was the candidate's ability "to reproduce the *discours* of the top leadership; other qualities were examined afterwards".⁵⁴ Neither had the Party - in its obstinance to create trustworthy party men and women - heeded the earlier warning signs concerning "old-style" teaching dispensed to members of a new type.

To a large extent, the party schools had retained their *simplicisme* of the 1950s and 1960s even though they were now often dealing with students with a good secondary or even higher education. In the words of Jean-Pierre Gaudard, "*En bref, si des enfants de 1968 pouvaient adhérer au PCF, se conformer, au moins en partie, à l'idéologie communiste, cela relevait toutefois d'un anachronisme. Parce qu'ils étaient de leur temps, ces adhérents ne pouvaient s'intégrer aussi profondément que leurs aînés.*"⁵⁵ It is also worth noting here that the 1980s witnessed the end of identification of the intellectuals with the PCF, the causes of which Hazareesingh⁵⁶ traces to the political and ideological intra-party conflicts after 1978. This break with the traditional past was officially recognised at the 25th Congress in 1985 when the congress resolution made no mention of the Party's "alliance" with French intellectuals. The demise of intellectual support had a considerable impact on the political teaching courses as will be seen from the study experience of Gérard Leneveu which will be examined below.

Ironically, this lean period saw the inauguration of the PCF's magnificent new "training institute", the *Ecole nationale* at Draveil in 1985, with accommodation for up to 200 students; a provision which proved to be very optimistic indeed. The party leadership which, for a long time, publicly remained in denial about the Party's decline, felt obliged to put forward "official" explanations for the reduction in student numbers after agreeing to the construction of such a vast complex. Francette Lazard, who was *la responsable* of the political education sector in 1979-84, admitted the low numbers in the 1980s but explained that they were due to the "great strategic mutation" that was taking place in the PCF after 1979 (i.e. the Party's adapting itself to participation in the Mauroy government after the 1979-81 sectarian phase). According to Lazard, the role of the political education system was far from clear in the changed circumstances and much of the party leadership was so busy adapting to the new strategy that there was no time

to focus on developing new courses and fitting in periods of training for militants who were in fact “better employed elsewhere, in practical tasks”.⁵⁷

We are finally left with the question of what kind of *people* - as opposed to members of given socio-professional categories and age groups - did go to party schools during this decade and how their training took place in practice. We shall therefore examine the study experience of a dedicated *militant* of the 1980s, namely Gérard Leneveu from Calvados, a train driver and a *permanent-CGT* at the time of the interview, who, with his impeccable working-class pedigree and trades union experience in a large public sector enterprise, fulfilled perfectly the requirements for an ideal student of the Party’s four-month central school. Leneveu’s itinerary also constitutes the perfect example of a successful, gradual process of political socialisation: the complete cycle from imbibing communist political culture in his childhood, youth, workplace and party, to a fully politically trained communist cadre, rewarded for his efforts by both social advancement and personal satisfaction.

“Jusqu’au dernier souffle”: the ideal cadre of the 1980s⁵⁸

Gérard Leneveu was born in Calvados in 1952 in a small rural *commune* of 500 inhabitants which had “always” voted for the PCF and had a communist Mayor. Leneveu’s grandfather had joined the Party soon after its foundation in 1922, and his father was a railway worker and CGT activist. Leneveu trained as a metal turner and started work in a metallurgical factory at the age of 17 in 1969, at which time he also joined the CGT. He had been interested in politics since his early teens and had already participated in the Events of May 1968. Before joining the PCF in 1972, Leneveu had toyed with various other ideas and had attended a couple of meetings of the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire*. Joining the Communist Party was an “important moment” in his life. He started his political career as the secretary of his cell and also became the organisational secretary of the railway workers’ section (having by now left the factory and joined the *SNCF*). Promotion was rapid for the politically motivated young man: first to section secretary, then to the federal committee. At this point he was asked “to do the schools”. After the elementary and federal schools and the one-month central

school in 1984, Marc Bellet, a local party leader and member of the PCF's Central Committee, suggested the four-month school for which the Party would arrange financial help to offset any salary losses. The school took place at the Party's *Ecole nationale* at Draveil from 17th October 1988 to 3rd February 1989.

Leneveu's course had 14 students including three women. The average age of the students was 36 years, and they had all completed the one-month central school. All but one had responsibilities at section or federal level. Among the students were four workers, four *ITCs*, two teachers and four students from various other professions. The director of the course was Denis Recoquillon, himself a product of the central schools.⁵⁹

The study programme included the usual main subjects of philosophy, political economy, history, the Party and practical work. Although theoretical study was still considered the cornerstone of the education programme and certainly gave treatment to historical issues, more and more emphasis was placed on current policy problems. These were dealt with in a series of lectures focusing on themes such as "What is the meaning of being a revolutionary today?", "The Party and Sport", "Technological issues, social change and *rassemblement*", "Capitalist exploitation today", "The agricultural crisis and the PCF", "The international dimensions of the crisis of capitalism", "Women in today's society", "Struggles for the new international order", "Europe", "The PCF and the environment", "The trades union movement", "The PCF and the young people", "The communist press", "Political parties and changes in political recomposition". Amongst lecturers were party leaders such as Jean-Claude Gayssot, Maxime Gremetz, Sylvie Mayer-Leroux (the PCF's environmental expert and a MEP), Ronald Leroy (editor of *L'Humanité*) and André Lajoinie (the 1988 presidential candidate). Teaching methods at the school were designed to elicit maximum participation from the students, and to this end all participants were expected to prepare for lectures in advance by reading vast amounts of relevant reference material and joining in group discussions and debates afterwards.

Apart from the lecture-based theoretical subjects, the students were required to work hard at improving their oral and written skills of communication. Pascal Santoni directed

an intensive short course in oral communication which most students had difficulty in following as demonstrated by Gérard Leneveu's hasty notes: "*Ce n'est pas un Gadget - l'expression devant une caméra. Il faut communiquer. Les agents accueils [sic] les idées en général à partir de leur propre vécu. Il faut exercer une influence sur leur comportement. Il faut qu'ils soient acteurs. Il faut que nous soyons accessibles, nos idées.*"⁶⁰

Students were also taught to design and write political tracts. Pierre Zarka's (from the *Secteur Communication du Comité Central*) course focused on the practical aspects involved in the planning and designing of an "efficient" tract. For this, the students were divided into two groups and each group was given a topic, "*Les salaires*" or "*L'Union*" on which to prepare their tracts. The following parameters had to be considered: the tract had to be tailored to suit its intended audience; it had to form a part of a larger campaign; it had to catch the people's interest; it had to be kept simple and factual; finally, the tract had to be both "concrete" and political ("the Party, not a trade union", according to Zarka).

Leneveu's group set to work on "*Les salaires*" and produced a couple of samples (see APPENDIX 8, p. 240): one was a drawing of a capitalist wearing a top hat, lighting his fat cigar with a 100 Franc note with the text "*L'argent des entreprises ne doit plus être gaspillés!*" and "*DE L'ARGENT, IL Y EN A!*" Another suggestion was a picture of a gift-wrapped parcel with a huge cross drawn over it: "*Les cadeaux aux patrons - ÇA SUFFIT! PAS DE CADEAU!*" Finally, the group produced a sketch of two people one of which was "Yves": "*Je m'appelle Yves, je suis régleur sur machines, j'ai 15 ans d'ancienneté, je gagne 4800 francs par mois.*" The other person was Liliane Bethencourt, the managing director of the cosmetics firm *L'Oréal*: "*Je suis Liliane Bethencourt, je suis PDG de l'Oréal, Yves règle MES machines, qui ME rapportent TOUTES LES 3 MINUTES 6000 FRANCS!*"⁶¹ The students had obviously internalised the objectives of their given tasks.

Another regular feature of the *travaux pratiques* sessions remained the *revue de presse* where the students followed the main press for a week or more or chose a specific event

and compared and analysed the reporting of the “enemy”. During Leneveu’s four-month course, the main topic chosen was the public sector strikes in the autumn of 1988. The students’ attention was drawn to the derogatory comments made by the “enemy” as regards the CGT’s “belated action in attempting to jump on the bandwagon” of the *coordinations* (i.e., the rank and file’s co-ordinating their own strike action independently of their unions, which was a new trend gaining popularity). At the end of this exercise there was a discussion for which the students had to produce a synthesis of the task. Gérard Leneveu concluded as follows:

*“Que faire? Continuer notre politique de rassemblement tournée vers les gens, surtout à un moment où ils luttent. Ne pas être frileux par rapport aux coordinations, quand cela doit ce faire il faut être dedans. Renforcer notre action dans la CGT, en s'appuyant sur un critère essentiel. Veiller à diffuser L'Huma sur les lieux où sa lutte, il faut amener le contre-poison aux idées dominantes. [...] Il faut que l'on soutienne les luttes, mais aussi et surtout que l'on soit acteurs, avec les gens de ces luttes, afin de déjouer tous les pièges et manoeuvres qui nous seront tendus dans les jours qui suivent. Il faut que nous soyons en harmonie avec le mouvement qui se développe.”*⁶²

One cannot help but get the impression that the Party’s lack of a coherent strategy was reducing the PCF to the very *cartel des mécontents* it was so hard trying to avoid.

Amongst all the hard work the students were also allowed leisure periods, usually sport. As Leneveu put it, “never have I done as much sport as during these four months!” There was an ulterior motive for that: some students “tended to get a little agitated, four months is a long time, after all”, and sport allowed them to let off steam. The cultural programme included visits to the cinema, theatre, concerts, opera, museums and once to the Moscow Circus (this new experience was “of particular importance” to Leneveu who had “lacked all cultural stimuli” in his youth).⁶³ In the middle of the school period, there were the Christmas and New Year’s celebrations (and a holiday period), and finally in February, a sumptuous *repas de clôture* (see APPENDICES 9 and 10, p. 241).

Right at the beginning of the school, the students had to produce a written piece on their personal motivation for participating at the four-month school. Again, Gérard Leneveu set pen to paper to explain:⁶⁴ “What has motivated me to participate in this four-month

school which is, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most privileged moments in the life of a militant?" First, it was important to expand "his field of knowledge" after his promotion to new responsibilities in the Party. The truth - as perceived by Leneveu - was that "communists are not born, they are made; and revolutionaries are not born, they are made". Having participated in the one-month school in September 1984, Leneveu had already learnt to make use of his new skills in the railway workers' strike in the winter of 1986-87: "In that strike, I had already been able to put into practice the theory that I had learnt in the one-month school; I was able to link theory with practice!" Leneveu also wanted to learn more about the practical ways of leading the "struggle": how to design a tract, speak in cell meetings, do door-to-door campaigning and other propaganda tasks. Finally, Leneveu wrote, "I hope that the four-month-school will make me a better leader and teach me to stand back and learn in order to be more efficient". In this way he hoped to be able to convey his newly acquired knowledge to his comrades: "When all is said and done, it is not about keeping all the experience just for me, ... but to utilise the enormous potential of people who are ready to join us, even just to *faire un petit bout de chemin ensemble*."

In his case, Leneveu's expectations were more than fulfilled. Promotion within the party apparatus followed swiftly as at each stage of training Leneveu was given a more responsible position.⁶⁵ Going to the four-month school had equipped him to carry out his responsibilities in the trades union and the Party more confidently and efficiently than before:

"I used to have difficulty in expressing myself in speaking, in writing ... These days, I write a lot. The Party has enabled me to develop on a personal level, too. The Party has given me the desire to discover ... everything! I could never envisage a life without the Party or political activities - can't imagine it. Jusqu'au dernier souffle!"

In addition to acquiring practical skills, Leneveu had also made life-long friends: "When we left, we cried like children... it was very hard, we had got to know each other so well. We had lived under the same roof for four months and had forged close links. *L'école, ce n'est pas seulement la théorie ...*" ⁶⁶ For Leneveu, then, the ideological and practical training he had received, as well as the social aspect of the school in the form

of strong friendships, proved the total reward for the commitment and personal investment he had made and left absolutely no room for doubt or reservations within himself.⁶⁷

Epilogue: “*Le Grand Séminaire*”⁶⁸

Finally, after much study and analysis of the experience of others, it is only appropriate that we should attempt to give a description of the “classroom reality”, i.e. a real flavour of what actually happens at the Party’s highest learning establishment, the *Ecole nationale* near Paris (see APPENDICES 12 and 13 p. 242-243). The author had the rather unique opportunity to visit the PCF’s central school in Draveil (Essonne), where it has been situated since 1985. The foundation stone was laid by Georges Marchais in 1983, and the two large modern buildings on the 16 000 square metre wooded site were designed by architects Annie and Louis Soria. The property was donated to the PCF by Sylvane Gervais, a life-long party member since the Congress of Tours, in 1920. The construction of the new building was financed partly by the sale of the central school buildings in Choisy-le-Roi and Viroflay, partly by donations by party members. The impressive complex with its archives, library, a gym, outdoors sports facilities and a small park, is intended to remind the students and other members of the proud traditions of French Communism and the importance of political education to the Party: “*L’ampleur et la qualité de cette réalisation sont à la mesure de l’importance que nous attachons à cette activité d’éducation des communistes.*”⁶⁹

At the time of my first visit in June 1991, the eight predominantly working-class students (Rabah, Michel, Jean-Michel, Robert, Yves, Gaétan, Placide and Daniel who had all attended the elementary and federal schools prior to coming to Draveil)⁷⁰ were into the third week of their one-month course. The first week’s theme included a discussion about the 27th Party Congress in 1990 and several lectures which reproduced some of the Congress themes: “Scientific and technological revolution”, “Capitalism a society of exploitation”, “The movement of capital”, “The challenge of our times” and the first lecture on Marxist philosophy. The week ended with a “*discussion collective: point de la semaine*” to sum up the first week’s learning experience. The second week

included another lecture on philosophy, practical work (preparation of a tract), and lectures on topics such as “The workplace: what is at stake in the class struggle”, “The origins of today’s crisis”, “Political and ideological recomposition”, and “French society”. During the third week there was a debate on how to orientate the PCF towards young people, a third lecture on philosophy, lectures on other Congress themes such as “The PCF’s programme for freedom”, “The PCF’s programme for justice” and “*Socialisme à la française*”. The students also visited the Central Committee, the offices of *L’Humanité* and went to see a play (“*Imprécation dans l’abattoir*”). The fourth and final week included more lectures, independent study, a visit to the *Musée de la Résistance* and a discussion directed by the old Thorezian hard-liner Gaston Plissonnier about what it means to be a communist today. A whole day was devoted to the preparation of the *bilan* of the one-month school period and at the end of the course, there was the traditional *repas fraternel* which offered an opportunity to reminisce about the unique training experience.

The daily routine of activities was strictly time-tabled. Breakfast was served at 8 o’clock with *L’Humanité* and other newspapers distributed for early morning familiarisation with the latest party line and other news. Lectures started at 9 o’clock and continued until lunchtime. Afternoons were devoted to personal study and sports (*pétanque*, table tennis, football) or more lectures. After the evening meal (usually between 6.30 and 8.30), there was more reading, writing and studying unless an excursion had been arranged. An important part of the daily routine was the rotation of jobs such as the distribution of post and newspapers, clearing of tables and making of coffee by the students. In this way, everybody was made to feel part of the “team”.

At the time of my visit⁷¹ during the third week of the course, I was able to attend the lectures given by Pascal Acot, a researcher at the CNRS and a writer of regular columns for *L’Humanité*, and Daniel Cirera, member of the Central Committee and the national secretary of the Peace Movement.

Pascal Acot had been lecturing on Marxist philosophy at the central school for the past five years and obviously knew the ropes: “*Salut les gars!*”, to which the students

responded, "*Salut Pascal!*" The party practice of *tutoiement* applied to the schools as well. Acot's lecture lasted three hours with a thirty-minute break for coffee and *pétanque* in the park. At the beginning, Acot explained some basic terminology and invited questions "*si l'on ne comprend pas*". The lecture turned out to be a polished performance by an experienced teacher: it was punctuated with many examples and illustrations and, at certain points, was delivered at almost dictation speed to enable the students to keep up with their note-taking. By the end of the lecture it was obvious that some participants were flagging and just mechanically jotting down what they could. The lecture was followed by a discussion which was scheduled to last one hour; but Acot had difficulty in eliciting questions or much response from the now exhausted students, for whom this lecture series was their first experience of Marxist philosophy at this level. Afterwards, one student admitted that he had lost his *fil rouge* shortly after the pause for *pétanque*. However, everybody was unanimous in their praise for Acot's superior knowledge: "*Pascal, c'est un sacré philosophe*", with "many publications to his credit". However, they were confident that they, too, would master the intellectual ramifications of Marxism which would be their "guide to action" and the "explainer of reality in all circumstances", as Placide put it.

The afternoon following Acot's lecture was devoted to reading and independent study in the school library. After early dinner, there was an excursion to the offices of *L'Huma* which was to be the bonding experience of the week. These visits were a regular feature of all central school programmes: they were intended to familiarise the students with the production of "their" newspaper - "*comment ça marche en pratique*". The guided tour was taken by Pierre Agudo, a journalist and himself a former central school student. It was a fascinating experience for all participants, in particular as it ended, by chance, with a reception given by the editor, Roland Léroy (see APPENDIX 14 p. 243), to visiting Soviet journalists (just two months before the August 1991 *putsch*). The *stagiaires* thoroughly enjoyed the company of 'notre Roland', the "fraternal and informal" atmosphere ("*C'est comme une grande famille*", enthused one), and the splendid surroundings ("*Ce n'est qu'un outil de travail; nous y avons participé tous*", was the justification for the unexpected splendour). After the excursion, the warmth of

the welcome and the *camaraderie* of my fellow travellers made it very difficult indeed - even for an outsider - not to feel part of their *grande famille*.

"Peace, disarmament, balance of power in the world and the new world order" was the title of the lecture given by Daniel Cirera. To prepare for the lecture, the students had read Cirera's book "*Des missiles pour quoi? L'alternative pacifiste*", an article about the francophone countries in Africa (*L'Humanité* 27.3.1991) and André Lajoinie's report to the Central Committee (18-19.4.1991).

Cirera's lecture embraced several main points: the Gulf War; the arms race; the process of disarmament; France's role in the above issues; the developing countries; the UN and the need to overhaul it. The main thread running through the lecture was the PCF's stance on these main points, i.e. the Party's categorical condemnation of the Gulf War and the arms race, and its strong support for the disarmament process; the Party's continued opposition to NATO (especially as the Warsaw Pact had ceased to exist); and the Communists' condemnation of the official French military policy as being offensive since its sole purpose was to support Mitterrand's idea of the "*rang de la France*". Regarding the Third World, Cirera underlined the contradictions which existed between militarisation and *co-opération*, as well as between the military and education budgets. Finally, moving to the UN, Cirera criticised the UN's involvement, or "its hijacking by the USA", in the Gulf War which made it an "institution for war-making".

The lecture was well received and followed by a lively discussion, as this time the students felt on firmer ground. There were questions on the role of the UN's Security Council, interventions referring to various points on the reading list, and also frank criticism of the PCF's "feeble effort" during the Gulf War: this was considered "*une occasion manquée*" at the time, as the Party should have been in a "privileged position to mobilise people, to recruit new members" but none of this was done "efficiently enough". In his response Cirera referred back to one of the Party's main campaign themes: there was a clear necessity for *everybody* to redouble their efforts to achieve "*union et rassemblement*", as it was impossible for the leadership to act on its own. Throughout the discussion, Cirera allowed enough room for a structured debate,

manifestly safe in the knowledge that his interlocutors were trusted militants, carefully chosen for their training course, and that it was unlikely that they would challenge the official party line in any way whatsoever. It was also obvious that the cadre schools were not devoted to a development of the critical spirit but rather to an assimilation of the current party policy (interpreted through and reinforced by theory); as demonstrated in the present and previous chapters, when that policy became untenable, another one was substituted and “taught” in turn.

When asked whether any students had ever seriously disagreed with their teachers or the party line, Lucien Bossu, the one-month director of the *Ecole nationale* in 1991, could not recall such an incident. It “might perhaps happen at a lower level”, people “might find out then that they are not suited to be trained for responsible positions in the Party”, but at the national level, it would be most unlikely. This did not mean that the schools were “blind to constructive criticism” but nor did it mean that the students were there “to challenge the party line!”⁷² The filtering process carried out in the lower schools would have therefore, it seems, ensured the loyalty of the trainees at higher levels. Nor had Marcel Rosette (director of the Central School 1956-63: see Chapter 4) experienced any such challenge: the students “were extremely motivated already”.⁷³ Nicolas Pasquarelli (central school director 1962-66: see Chapter 4) had come across a couple of students whose “interventions were not appropriate and they were asked to leave”. On the whole, however, it was “more likely that there would be problems as regards sexual promiscuity,” (four months is a long time, as Pasquarelli put it) “than with straying from the party line”.⁷⁴ Finally, Henri Martin (central school director 1978-83: see Chapter 5) had not encountered any problems during his directorship although “once or twice, a student had left the Party *after* attending the cadre school; *ça arrive, ...*”⁷⁵

Given that the students selected for the training schools were by definition already partially ‘socialised’ into the Party, had been tested and observed ‘in action’ and had been through the early stages of the structured system of the schools which weeded out any potentially unsuitable candidates, the teachers had a dream audience: attentive, compliant, keen to learn, motivated - and captive.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the development of the PCF's political education system in 1981-90, the final decade covered by this study. Three main areas came under scrutiny: the response of the education programmes to the national and international events and the Party's strategy shifts following its congresses; the evolution of the student population of the PCF's central schools in the context of the Party's serious decline in all areas of activity; finally, the itinerary and personal experience of a modern communist militant in the communist education system, and a description of "classroom reality" as experienced by the author at first hand.

The development of the education programmes showed to what extent the programme planners were struggling to keep abreast with the zig-zags in party strategy which, for most of the time, was driven by electoral exigency. The PCF's innovations were always derivative as it was still adjusting to the agenda set by the PS, and therefore lacked any intellectual inspiration of its own. In the 1970s, the schools had played an important part in introducing and updating party strategy and steering the activists toward and through the Left Union, but during this strategically chaotic period they had no comparable function to fulfil. The training programme planners' answer to the incoherent turns of strategy (the attempts to convey the Party's see-saw tactics as regards the Socialist Party and the Soviet Union were clear examples) was to lean heavily on scientific socialism and to emphasise, perhaps more than ever before, the linking of theory with practice in order to find a point of anchorage. The reviews of the study programmes - reviews which mainly gave treatment to current policy problems and were sluggish at best - remained strictly a leadership affair, supervised by CP officials and often led by second-rate minds. It was therefore obvious that as long as the Party's Central Committee had the final say in the drawing up of the teaching programmes and in the selection of the students, the schools would remain firmly under the leadership's control and continue to teach what emanated from above to an ever shrinking audience, already out of touch with the French political and social reality and utterly failing to generate any intellectual energy or excitement.

The analysis of the evolution of the student population confirmed the continuation of the trends which emerged in 1974-80: the slow “deproletarianisation” of the one-month schools and the continuing over-representation of workers in the four-month schools. The decline of the Party and the communist-dominated CGT was reflected by the dwindling student numbers, although there were other causes: the historic base of student recruitment, namely the manual working class, was eroding; traditional militancy was on the wane; the dissidents, for obvious reasons, were not available for political training; and the quality of teaching had ceased to inspire many potential students as the Party’s intellectual and cultural resources were simply not up to the task.

One of the main tasks of the party training system had always been to select potential cadres and mould them into trustworthy militants who would serve in the Party’s middle and top apparatus and its various mass movements. As discussed in Chapter 2, the purpose of political education never was to radically change attitudes and behaviour - the educators were already preaching to the converted - nor to produce too sophisticated an end product. The main intention was to create, from a very heterogeneous raw material, continuity and homogeneity. To this end the system was mostly working as planned more than half a century ago: compared with the experiences and impressions of students before him, Gérard Leneveu’s account and the author’s own experience of cadre training show indeed that, in the 1980s, a great many of the PCF’s leadership training procedures remained virtually frozen in previous decades and had become regularised “rituals” from which neither the instructors nor the students could extricate themselves even if they had wanted to. With their implanted vision of a society of exploited manual workers, the students graduating from the Party’s central schools were products of a by-gone era. The political education system thus came to be used as a brake on change and became a further manifestation of the PCF’s inflexibility, immobilism and conservatism.

Notes and references

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1. HINCKER, *France: le PCF divorce de la société*, *op. cit.*
 2. *Canard Enchaîné*, see ADERETH, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
 3. DAINOV, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

4. Interview with Francette Lazard 3.4.1992, Paris. Francette Lazard was *la responsable du secteur éducation* 1979-84, member of the PCF's Politbureau and Central Committee. Lazard joined the PCF in the 1950s, had links with the Banque Lazard through her paternal grandfather who subsequently left the bank and became a "gentleman of independent means". Her mother was a pediatrician and her father a surgeon; her own profession was *professeur agrégé* (the highest teaching qualification in France); this background made her one of the very few exceptions in the Party leadership. She had been *permanente* since 1970s, first as the director of *France Nouvelle*, then chief editor of *L'Humanité* 1976-79. Despite her career in the Party, she had "never been to a party school".
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. See ADERETH, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-68, for an account of the 24th Congress, on which the details here are based.
8. Ibid.
9. Programme of the one-month central school, July 1981. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
10. Programme of the four-month central school, March-September, 1982. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
11. Programme of the four-month central school, September 1982 - January 1983. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
12. Programme of the four-month central school, September 1983 - December 1983, Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne. Marchais also added triumphantly: "*On évoque beaucoup, ces temps-ci, - du Figaro à Libération - les fameuses 'couleuvres' que nous avions, paraît-il, du mal à avaler. Eh bien! Voyez-vous, camarades, quand je rappelle, par cette simple énumération, ce que nous avons fait depuis 1981, je me dis que des 'couleuvres' comme les nationalisations ou la retraite à 60 ans, je me porte volontaire pour en avaler, tous les jours, matin, midi et soir! Et que ce sont plutôt les grands patrons et les petits July qui ont l'air de les trouver singulièrement indigestes ...*"
13. DAINOV, *op. cit.*, p. 370.
14. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 397.
15. DREYFUS, *op. cit.*, p. 179. The six members were Pierre Juquin, Marcel Rigout, Ellen Constans, Félix Damette, Yvan Tricart, and Marc Zamischei. Whereas in the 24th Congress in 1982, 1.54% of the delegates at the federal conferences debating the draft resolution had abstained, the *contestataires* represented now 8% of the total (which still left 92% voting in favour!). Another eight dissidents then resigned from the CC.
16. Ibid., p. 180.
17. Nevertheless, according to the leadership, their ministers were "simply the best", and the Elysée and Matignon "had regularly consulted them on everything". ROBRIEUX, *Histoire intérieure, Tome III, op. cit.*, p. 530.
18. DREYFUS, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
19. YSMAL, *op. cit.*, pp 135-6.
20. *Le Monde, Elections législatives 1986, Dossiers et documents.*
21. Programme of the four-month central school, September-December 1986. Archives de l'Ecole

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- nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
22. TIERSKY, *Declining fortunes of the French Communist Party*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 23. *Communisme*, 15-16, pp. 166-67 and pp. 172-74.
 24. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 399.
 25. *Le Monde*, *Bilan du septennat*, p. 72; also *Cahiers du communisme*, Oct. 1981, April 1982 and February 1984.
 26. *Communisme*, 15-16, p. 166.
 27. *Résolution du 26e Congrès du PCF*, p. 3.
 28. Ecole élémentaire du PCF, juin 1985. *Cours 1*, p. 12, *Cours 2*, p. 7, in VAN DIGGELEN (now KIVISAARI), 'On ne naît pas communiste, on le devient: French Communist Party Education Today', *op. cit.*, p. 27.
 29. Programme of the one-month central school, April, 1986. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne.
 30. Programme of the four-month central school, February - May 1987. Archives de l'Ecole nationale du PCF. Draveil, Essonne.
 31. BELL & CRIDDLE, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
 32. *Cahiers du communisme*, juin, 1987.
 33. *Ibid.*, novembre, 1987.
 34. *Le Monde*, 13.10.89 and *Le Point*, 16.10.89.
 35. BRIDGFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. *Résolution du 27ème Congrès du PCF*, pp. 11-13.
 38. Interview with Lucien Bossu, 20.6.1991, at the *Ecole nationale du PCF*, Draveil, Essonne.
 39. *L'Humanité* ran a full front-page headline "La Fête a parlé!" on 17th September 1991.
 40. *Cahiers du communisme*, octobre 1991, pp. 22-33, pp. 38-46, pp. 47-49, pp. 51-66.
 41. *Bulletin du secteur éducation du Comité central du Parti communiste français*, no. 2, octobre 1991.
 42. Interview with Lucien Bossu, 20.6.1991. For example, membership of mass movements and electoral responsibilities were no longer listed for this period.
 43. COURTOIS, S. 'Les cadres du Parti communiste: la crispation orthodoxe', in SOFRES, *L'état de l'opinion 1992*. (Eds. de Seuil, 1992), pp.159-79.
 44. COURTOIS & LAZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 423.
 45. RANGER, J., 'Forces et faiblesses du PCF', *Les enjeux institutionnels et politiques de mars 1986* (Association de 'Etude des Réalités institutionnelles et politiques, Journées d'études 31 janvier-1er février 1986), p. 35.
 46. *Ibid.*

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47. Ibid., p. 36.
 48. See COURTOIS & PESCHANSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 52 for a fuller discussion.
 49. HAZAREESINGH, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
 50. DREYFUS, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
 51. COURTOIS & PESCHANSKI, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
 52. Ibid. After the 1978 legislative elections, hundreds of Communists signed a petition demanding a real debate on party strategy; in 1979, the majority of editorial teams of the Party publications *France Nouvelle* and *La Nouvelle Critique* revolted which led to the closure of both publications and their replacement by *Révolution*, itself reshuffled again in 1985.
 53. CARDOZE, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
 54. Ibid., p. 90.
 55. GAUDARD, *op. cit.*, p. 42. This clearly also reflects the experience of Bernard Pudal and Jean Marie Argelès (see Chapter 5).
 56. HAZAREESINGH, *op. cit.*, In his book, Hazareesingh examines emergence and the subsequent demise of intellectual identification with the PCF in 1945-89.
 57. Interview with Francette Lazard in Paris, 3.4.1992.
 58. Interviews with Gérard Leneveu in Caen, 25.11.1991 and 20.2.1992.
 59. Interview with Denis Recoquillon at the *Ecole nationale du PCF*, Draveil, Essonne, 20.6.1991.
 60. Hand-written notes kindly made available by Gérard Leneveu (underlining in the original).
 61. Ibid.
 62. Ibid.
 63. Films seen by the students included "1788" and Renoir's "*La Marseillaise*"; they also went to see Brecht's "*Arturo Ui*", the opera "*Carmen*" and the Spanish National Ballet. Museums visited included *Musée des arts et tradition populaires* and *Musée de la Résistance*. In addition, the students also took part in a conducted tour of the Rungis wholesale market in Paris.
 64. Hand-written notes kindly made available by Gérard Leneveu.
 65. Interview with Gérard Leneveu in Caen, 25.11.1991. Leneveu started off as the section secretary and progressed to the federal bureau (special responsibilities in health, distribution of *l'Humanité*) and to the position of the organisational secretary of his trades union CGT. Career progression was not of any interest to Leneveu: "*On se bat toujours pour une bonne cause: dans le Parti, il n'y a pas de carriéristes! Mais c'est vrai que chaque fois que je faisais des écoles, on m'a monté dans le niveau des responsabilités.*"
 66. Interview with Gérard Leneveu in Caen, 20.2.1992.
 67. Similar sentiments were expressed by Leneveu's *camarade* in the Calvados federal committee, Danièle Garnier, who had completed the one-month central school in 1987. After her training period Garnier returned to Caen but "*j'étais ailleurs ... cela m'a pris 15 jours pour m'habituer à vivre, à militer dans mon syndicat. J'ai mis 15 jours pour refaire surface, j'ai mis un certain temps pour pouvoir articuler tout. Ça reste un moment important dans ma vie, l'école d'un mois. Et je ne suis pas la seule: ceux qui rentrent de l'école de quatre mois, ça reste immense. J'ai toujours mon dossier d'école, le dossier entier, je l'ai gardé précieusement, dans l'ordre des cours*"

donnés." (Interview with Danièle GARNIER in Caen, 25.11.1991)

68. HARRIS & DE SEDOUY, *op. cit.*, p. 22: "Pour ceux qui comparent, peut-être un peu facilement, le Parti à l'Eglise, l'Ecole centrale, c'est le Grand Séminaire."
69. *L'Humanité*, 30.9.1985, reporting on the inauguration of the *Ecole nationale* in Draveil.
70. The students were: Jean-Michel Brun (civil servant and member of the Hauts-de-Seine federal committee), Yves Chaperon (typographer and member of the Eure federal bureau), Rabah Dahloul (community worker and member of the Val-de-Marne section committee), Gaétan Levitre (boilermaker, member of the Eure federal secretariat and Mayor of Alizay), Daniel Oriol (machine operator and member of the Isère section bureau), Robert Seguela (railway worker and member of the section secretariat at SNCF Austerlitz, Paris), Michel Sirera (Paris transport worker and member of the section committee RATP Championnet, Paris), Placide Vasquez (worker and member of the Isère federal committee).
71. See also VAN DIGGELEN (NOW KIVISAARI), 'On ne naît pas communiste, on le devient: French Communist Party Education Today', *op. cit.*, for a detailed description.
72. Interview with Lucien Bossu, 20.6.1991.
73. Interview with Marcle Rosette, 9.9.1991.
74. Interview with Nicolas Pasquarelli, 9.9.1991.
75. Interview with Henri Martin, 31.3.1992.

CONCLUSION

*"... Le PCF, comme dans une forteresse assiégée, croyait-il devoir blinder les coeurs et passer le temps en s'abîmant dans la lecture et l'étude?"*¹

This study set out to examine the role played by the political education system of the French Communist Party in the decline of that Party. Our aim was to ascertain to what extent the influence exercised by the central control and direction of the political education of successive generations of party cadres reinforced the French Communist Party's general reluctance to change and thus contributed to the Party's decline. It was argued that by skilfully utilising the Party's organisational principle of democratic centralism, and by making systematic use of its political training system, the communist leadership ensured the availability of more or less "obedient clones" who would perpetuate the conservative outlook of their superiors. It might be objected that this focus on a purely intra-party element has provided an unnecessarily limited and narrow account of the marginalisation of the PCF. Equally, it could be asserted that the approach adopted in this investigation has emphasised the significance of the Party's training system at the expense of the wider body of exogenous causes. Before presenting the conclusions that have emerged from our investigation, it will therefore be useful to review the starting point of this study and the subsequent argument.

Another "voyage à l'intérieur" of the French Communist Party

French Communism was in long-term decline well before the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the watershed which finally undermined the relevance and credibility of Communist Parties throughout Europe. For many years, scholars of French politics had been conducting studies into the decline of the PCF and analysing the main contributory causes, namely the transformation of socio-economic structures in France since the late 1960s; institutional factors, i.e. presidentialism resulting in particular from the 1962 constitutional reform, and bipolarisation involving the creation of alternative governing alliances; the rise of the French Socialist Party since 1974; and the sharp deterioration of the Soviet image in French opinion, in particular since the 1970s. There was unanimous agreement that the party leadership with its orthodox regime and

intransigent practices was the one common denominator, *le fil rouge* which ran through the process of decline. The novelty of the approach adopted here is that, whilst not denying the importance of the other contributory factors, it focuses primarily on the party leadership's own complacency and inability to adapt to changes which were taking place in the Party's social, institutional, political and international environment. It was therefore important to begin by analysing these already established causes of the decline of the PCF, and then to test the hypothesis *that the Party need not have been a victim of unseen forces that led inexorably to disaster, nor a victim of its history, but that at each stage, there were active choices to be made.*

Our examination of the leadership's own role in the marginalisation of the PCF revealed the extent of the damage inflicted. Under its "workerist" and anti-PS leadership, the Party lost touch with the social realities in France. Moreover, the leadership miscalculated the *équilibre des forces* on the French left and ignored for too long the institutional threats; these miscalculations also led to serious strategic errors concerning the potential of the rejuvenated Socialist Party. Finally, the unconditional solidarity with the Soviet Union as advocated by the PCF leadership caused the deterioration of the image of the entire communist movement in France.

This suggested that the roots of the decline had to be sought primarily from within rather than without. An analysis focusing on the Party's mode of functioning and its internal dynamics revealed the extent to which the communist leadership was in fact able to make use of the Party's organisational principle of democratic centralism in order to retain its disproportionate power. This in turn prompted the question of why and how the Communist leadership was able to implement a principle - which seemed in theory to be highly democratic - in such an *undemocratic* way. The answer was simple: it had at its disposal a trained body of functionaries and militants who would unquestioningly apply party policy and thwart any attempt to oppose it. Therefore, while democratic centralism formed the infrastructure and framework for the way the Party functioned, it was only permitted to do so within the context of the communist theory and ideology which acted as the "cement" or discipline holding the Party together. Since the discipline of a Communist Party relies heavily on the conviction and commitment of its members,

it is evident that their loyalty to the Party would not develop to the necessary degree without a systematic strengthening of their grasp of party theory and ideology. Theory and ideology therefore had to be taught. This provided the *pons asinorum* for our study: by dovetailing the functions of democratic centralism and political education, the leadership succeeded in adroitly securing all the power in its own hands and thus ensured its own succession by ideologically reliable cadres.

The PCF was of course not the only party to set up a political education system; nor was political education the only means used in the process of political socialisation. Our investigation of political education as one element in political socialisation revealed that the advantages of an efficient training system had been understood by political movements at an early stage. We were also able to demonstrate that it was in fact a precondition of formal political instruction that its recipients should have already been exposed to a number of other agencies of socialisation. This enabled us to establish the crucial importance of the party political education system as the final piece in the jigsaw that made up the fully trained and successfully politically socialised "ideal cadre".

Promoting trustworthy cadres to suitable positions was of vital importance, and so one of the principal functions of the political education system was to select potential students for moulding into loyal militants to serve in the party apparatus and various party-controlled organisations. In theory, any PCF member was eligible to attend the party schools. In practice however, recruitment for the higher levels in particular was based on strict selection in which earlier socialisation into the party, manifestation of political reliability and experience as well as social background were critical factors. The education system was primarily designed to unify the behaviour and outlook of cadres and to produce continuity and homogeneity - a status quo with no surprises or radical changes. In this area, the PCF's political education system proved to be an unqualified success: the party definition of the "perfect cadre", an entity whose desired characteristics were compiled in the 1930s, was still recognisable amongst the alumni of the PCF's central schools more than half a century after the system had been set up.

The PCF's system for political training was set up in the 1920s. Since the early architects of the education programmes had little understanding of the workings of a Communist Party and a very hazy idea of Marxism, the training of the party cadres was unsystematic and experimental, and mostly supervised by foreign nationals under the watchful eye of the Comintern. Many PCF members received their higher political education in the Soviet Union. It was not until the PCF made the critical transition to a mass-based political party in the Popular Front era that the French party leadership came to fully understand the value and importance of an efficient political education system to satisfy the Party's urgent need for trained militants. The setting up of a stable school network was also helped by the fact that by then, the Comintern-imposed bolshevisation process had been successfully completed in the French Communist Party. This resulted in the formation of the predominantly working-class *groupe dirigeant fondamental* with Maurice Thorez at its helm. Thorez's leadership group would remain solid until his retirement some 30 years later. Significantly, the Thorezian regime also bequeathed to its successors the rigidly structured training system which had already made a vital contribution to the creation and maintenance of party unity and cohesion following the turbulence of the earlier decade.

After the Liberation, the PCF began to mature as a complex political organisation. It had new responsibilities, both at national and local level, which required ideologically correct leadership skills and a far greater degree of organisational cohesion than hitherto. It also needed reliable functionaries to operate the vast internal apparatus that had been built up, and trained cadres to direct its mass mobilisation work. By the 1950s, the PCF's network of schools was operating successfully at all three levels. Our investigation revealed the tactical logic behind the structure of the party school network. It was noted how advanced degrees of political training went hand-in-hand with advanced degrees of involvement, commitment and advancement in the party. At the base there were the elementary schools, which provided political education for the new recruits, equipping them with a certain minimum of political education and creating a sense of commitment and belonging so that their membership would not remain merely nominal. At the next stage, the federal schools were designed for those who had already completed the elementary school programme and had certain responsibilities in the Party

at cell, section or federal level. The apex of this network of schools was the one or four-month central schools which were intended for those with considerable organisational experience, leadership potential and an unshakeable loyalty to the Party. Candidates to the central school programmes were put forward by their federations; however, since the *Secteur d'éducation* of the PCF's Central Committee made the final decision after consulting the student's personal record, it meant that the selection process in the elite establishments was under the strict control of the leadership.

Soviet influence remained strong in the PCF's political education system well into the 1970s and a important number of the major figures in the Party were trained in Moscow. The selection process was supervised by both the PCF and the CPSU to ensure that only "trustworthy" people were sent. It is a testimony to their unshakeable loyalty and the efficacy of the training process that even after seeing the Soviet reality with their own eyes, most of them remained faithful to their ideals.

The study programmes were also drawn up by the *Secteur d'éducation*. As the schools were not "schools" in the traditional sense of the word, there were very few subjects *per se* (Marxist philosophy, political economy and history were central themes common to all eras); instead, the teaching tended to focus on various traditional or topical "*thèmes*" relevant to a particular period. The "*thèmes*" were generally based on the resolutions and decisions of the party congresses and accurately reflected the changes and shifts of party policy as determined by political circumstances and developments in France and abroad (usually, in the Soviet Union) at any given time.

The study programmes were always backed up by an extensive and compulsory reading programme whose contents faithfully mirrored and reinforced the current party line and thinking. The practical side of the course programmes was dealt with the teaching of routine political tasks, *travaux pratiques*, whose content and form hardly changed from one decade to another. Study sessions were also accompanied by debates, discussions and group work the purpose of which was to accustom the students to team work and also to "supervise" their thinking process. These sessions were directed by experienced

party instructors who did not need to fear any challenges from their carefully selected students who shared their basic mindset.

This programme of theoretical and practical study was lightened by a cultural programme which was first introduced in the 1930s by Etienne Fajon and remained subsequently a standard feature of the party schools. "Teaching culture" - a job carried out by "reliable" party intellectuals - also followed the trends of the era concerned, from the adulation of socialist realism to more modern cultural concepts in later years.

By the 1950s, the political education system, then, already presented in many ways a mirror image of the Party. Like the PCF, it too appeared successful, enthusiastic and dynamic in the immediate postwar era; and just like the PCF, isolated from mainstream politics in France, the political education system then threw itself into the feverish counter-community life style in order to help preserve communist identity and values in the hostile environment. In this activity it proved its worth by maintaining the morale and motivation of party members, militants and cadres and by acting as an invaluable mechanism for safeguarding the leadership's authority, even when that leadership was physically absent (as Maurice Thorez was in the early 1950s). But the early triumphs of the communist education system also contained the seeds of its own downfall; the training procedures and methods developed in this era still governed the preparation of French communist cadres in the 1980s and beyond.

Cautious changes in the PCF as advocated first by Waldeck Rochet's leadership were reflected in the political education programmes, as they introduced the concept of a Common Programme to the trainee cadres and guided them on the path towards the Left Union. This was followed by attempts to change the rigid methods of teaching by allowing more open debate and free discussion; again, this mirrored the PCF's efforts towards more openness and flexibility in the early 1970s. Ironically, the PCF's new strategy of alliance building and openness made the education system's traditional role as a reinforcer of party identity somewhat redundant in the early days of Left Union. However, this function was quickly reactivated when the communist leadership returned to its isolation and its policy of *centralité ouvrière*. We noted that this policy was

reflected in the social origins of the central schools' student population, in particular those of the PCF's elite four-month central schools, where students from working-class background dominated. On the other hand, coupled with the rise of the middle class, this period also saw the emergence of a new type of student and party member, better educated and better informed than in the past, who now began to express criticism of the "simplistic" study programmes and methods used in party schools. This new development was in clear conflict with the "reproletarianisation" programme which the communist leadership, by systematically favouring the access of working-class students to the higher echelons of the Party, was preparing to implement at the precise time when the working class in France was diminishing significantly.

Throughout the 1980s the PCF found itself in a situation of accelerated and unrelenting decline. As the leadership controlled the preparation of the study programmes, the incoherent and vague strategies which were prompted by the Party's needs to survive were conveyed to the dwindling student audience in party schools. While the training system had previously proved a useful means of introducing, up-dating and maintaining the Party's strategic choices, it now had nothing coherent to convey. The hastily prepared study programmes were merely responses to the *mots d'ordre* of the party congresses and the Marchais leadership and lacked inspiration and intellectual vision. With the membership in decline, militancy on the wane, and student numbers less than half of those in the previous decade, the whole relevance of the education system seemed in doubt. The final blow came with the collapse of Communism; this was the last chance for the Party and the education system which it controlled, to engage in an *autocritique* and respond in a new manner. The Party would not, and the education system therefore could not; they thus continued to perpetuate the inflexibility, immobilism and conservatism that had been their trademarks for much of their existence.

Bilan - globalement

What, then, has been the general contribution or usefulness of the political training system to French Communism?

From the *Party's* own point of view, the political education system fulfilled many useful functions, and its importance in propping up the organisation is beyond dispute. The training system clearly contributed to the preservation of the PCF's specific identity and internal cohesion in times of trouble. It also pinpointed goals and provided ideological justification for personal commitment and loyalty, which in turn reinforced discipline. Moreover, the party schools brought together people from different backgrounds with initially varying degrees of commitment and varying interpretations of communist beliefs. A further transformation then took place to give all communists a common set of goals and values which combined to produce a "homogeneous" and trustworthy body of communist cadres. This in turn helped to develop and maintain the feeling of community, a *sensus communismi*, which was essential for the Party. The system also provided the leadership with an efficient instrument for centralised control and a means of disseminating the party line at any given time.

This obviously called for a special type of *teacher*, an instructor and a guide rather than a lecturer who might show off his or her own knowledge and thus undermine the confidence of the mainly working-class and uneducated students. However, as the real "knowledge" remained the powerful and versatile tool of the leadership, the Party predominantly recruited its instructors on the basis of their experience in the party organisation and their working-class background (although there never was a shortage of trained schools teachers amongst the membership). Regular training and briefing sessions for actual and potential teachers ensured the correct interpretation of each new syllabus which was issued as well the appropriate methods in taking classes.

For the *students*, there were considerable personal rewards in the form of improved status and responsibility within the Communist movement. The training programmes were instrumental in elite recruitment and therefore important vehicles for social mobility, in particular in the case of working-class students. The learning experience *per se* gave the students - most of whom had only a basic education - a tremendous sense of self-achievement and confidence in their intellectual capacities, which could only increase their feeling of loyalty towards the Party, the provider of the mental stimulus

and tool of their intellectual liberation. The academic aspect of studying was an obvious attraction to disempowered workers of limited education; at the same time, it also maintained the morale of the *permanents* and militants by offering a brief period of “spiritual” escape from the routine political tasks, in fraternal company and conducive surroundings, a time to recharge and sustain commitment - and to quench their bottomless *soif d'apprendre*. Furthermore, the shrewdly planned and gradually extended teaching of the vital elements of theory and practice at various levels provided the militants with a certain type of behaviour pattern and language of their own, which facilitated communication within the Party and thus formed yet another element of internal unity and discipline. The investment of time and energy increased as the students became more involved and realised that they were in fact approaching the inner circles of the Party. For those who had been through the “complete education experience” there remained a feeling of belonging, of a comradesly solidarity, all of which reinforced the *esprit de parti* of the “believers” whose acquired convictions could then resist considerable shocks.

In sum, then, we now have a picture of a tightly-knit system controlled by an orthodox and powerful leadership, a leadership who wished above all to ensure that it would eventually be succeeded by purposely trained cadres who would in turn obediently perpetuate the conservative outlook of their predecessors. Stalin's dictum, “cadres decide everything”, was taken seriously: hence in order to achieve the necessary ideologically sound “leadership material”, the Party continued throughout its history to allocate a large portion of its human and material resources to the creation and perpetuation of a political training system which aimed to mould men and women into political instruments. As it was the PCF's Central Committee which had the final say on drawing up the study programmes, selecting the students and appointing the teachers (or supplying them from its own ranks), the education system remained firmly as the leadership's *chasse gardée*; what it taught was strictly defined and regulated by the orders which emanated from above. This came out with particular clarity in the way changes in party line (especially as regards the USSR and the Socialist Party) were conveyed to the students. It is important to note that this political training system was efficiently safeguarded and held in place by the Party's organisational principle of

democratic centralism. Furthermore, both training system and organisational principle were very closely connected since the cohesion and unity of the communist party fundamentally depended on the discipline and conviction of its membership. Thus, the internal political education system propped up democratic centralism by supplying "suitable material" to implement it, while democratic centralism in turn provided the framework for the dissemination of the orthodox ideology. The communist political education system therefore formed one of the most important institutions for the perpetuation of the private and all embracing world of French Communism.

It has often been pointed out that the fundamental contradiction in the existence of the French Communist Party is the fact that it is (was) a revolutionary movement operating in a non-revolutionary environment and circumstances, and therefore its decline was a foregone conclusion. However, our argument has been that there was no inherent characteristic of the PCF which forced it to remain a victim of its history and prevented it from responding and adapting to changes in the Party's social, institutional, political and international environment. The fact that the Party did not in fact make this adaptation, and that its choices turned out to be the wrong ones, was the consequence of the decisions and actions of the leadership at decisive *tournants* of the Party's life. The communist leadership, from 1956 onward, consistently thwarted the emergence of healthier options which might have steered the Party into clearer waters, away from its stormy Stalinist past. Any significant changes in the PCF's *modus operandi* that might have permitted it to take advantage of opportunities on offer rather than allow these opportunities to be transformed into disadvantages, were always made too late - if in fact they were made at all. Ironically, the PCF - an entity whose aims and very *raison d'être* were built upon the concept of radical revolution - remained an organisation with deep-rooted conservatism at its very core and its collective memory fixated by perceptions of its heroic past.

For a long time, then, a carefully selected and trained elite contributed to and shared the successes of the French Communist Party. What worked well for the PCF during its first three decades could not however withstand the inexorable evolution of modern France and the changes in its international environment. But a culture in decline traditionally

has enormous difficulty in understanding the fact of decline, let alone dealing with it. Thus, when developments outside of the Party, in particular as the late 1970s gave way to the early 1980s, called for more differentiated leadership, the system that had begun to mould party leaders in the Stalinist era became, in the hands of conservative and intransigent leaders, a major mechanism for stalling change and obstructing modernisation.

None of the arguments above constitutes a claim that the approach taken in this study can provide the one decisive explanation for the decline of the French Communist Party. Rather, it is suggested that the role of the PCF's political education system, as utilised by the party leadership, was just one facet in the complex process of the Party's decline. As the PCF's top echelons, in the furtherance of their own ends, used the education system as an additional instrument for controlling *le peuple communiste*, this system, which could well have been deployed as a brake to the Party's decline, simply ended up as a factor which mirrored and exacerbated this decline.

Notes and references

1. KRIEGEL, *Ce que j'ai cru comprendre*, op. cit., p. 564.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. APPRENDRE, mars 1947

Un précieux outil pour l'éducation théorique et vicieuse de chaque militant.

LES CAHIERS DU COMMUNISME

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NUMERO SPECIAL

— consacré aux —

EXERCICES PRATIQUES des ECOLES ELEMENTAIRES

MARS 1947

N° 7

Appendix 2. APPRENDRE, août 1947

passant alors chacun d'eux, bien que en commun soit très étendu (certains camarades sont à 7 km. du bourg) et c'est le camarade Hamon, député, qui a fait les cours.

La preuve est faite une fois de plus : il suffit de s'en occuper sérieusement pour réussir !



LES COURS DE FORMATION MARXISTE-LÉNINISTE A FLOUÈRE
Toute la section en parle et... y va !

DU SÉRIEX ET DE L'ENTRAÏN

Citons la dernière école de Lille-Centre. Là, les membres des bureaux de section ont visité chaque cellule pour le recrutement et la préparation politique de l'école. Ils ont discuté et expliqué les buts et l'utilité d'une telle école.

Sur vingt inscrites, les quatre cours furent suivis par seize élèves, dont sept femmes.

Les camarades se sont inquiétés de connaître la raison des absences et sont allés voir chez eux ceux qui n'avaient pu assister à tous les cours.

Ces cours ont été vivants. Beaucoup de questions et de discussions entre élèves, provoquées par le professeur.

Un vin d'honneur offert par le Comité de section a terminé gaiement le programme après qu'une photo de tous les assistants ait été prise.

★ ★

Retenons enfin l'exemple de la section de Chelles (Seine-et-Marne) qui a clôturé ses dernières écoles de section d'une manière remarquable.

A cet effet, une soirée récréative fut organisée un samedi soir dans une salle aménagée et décorée avec soin. Les élèves et leurs familles étaient invités. C'est donc devant plus de soixante person-

nes, sous la présidence des dirigeants de la section, du maire, des conseillers municipaux, que se déroula, dans l'enthousiasme et la plus complète fraternité, l'agréable soirée au cours de laquelle il y eut vin d'honneur, sketches, chansons, etc.

Après la partie artistique, il y eut une remise solennelle de livres à chaque élève : les uns partirent avec le magnifique ouvrage d'Illie, « Les montagnes et les hommes » ; d'autres avec les « Œuvres choisies » de Lénine, etc.

En se séparant, ceux qui n'avaient pas encore suivi une école du Parti ne manquaient pas de dire : « On ira à la prochaine ! »

Le Comité de section de Chelles, qui mérite nos félicitations, a fait un effort dont de nombreuses sections, nous en sommes convaincus, ne manqueront pas de s'inspirer.

□

« L'ignorance n'a encore jamais été utile à personne ! »

KARL MARX.

Appendix 3. APPRENDRE, décembre 1951. Etude individuelle ("Fils du peuple")

Faits	Explication des faits	Notions théoriques
1921 : le Parti se dressa contre l'occupation de la Ruhr (pages 44-45).	La politique de l'ainé, politique impérialiste dictée par les hommes du capital financier (les 200 familles : <i>Fils du peuple</i> , pages 93-95), est contraire aux intérêts de la classe ouvrière non seulement d'Allemagne, mais aussi de France, comme aux véritables intérêts de la nation française. (Pour plus de détails, lire : André Marty, « <i>Le Parti Communiste Français, né et forgé dans la lutte contre la guerre</i> », <i>Cahiers du Communisme</i> , n° 12, 1950, pages 33 à 45.)	L'internationalisme prolétarien et le patriotisme ne sont nullement contradictoires, mais sont deux aspects complémentaires de la politique de la classe ouvrière qui, à notre époque, tend à s'identifier à la nation. <i>Fils du peuple</i> , pp. 55-56 et pp. 96-97.
1925-1927 : Première contacts de Maurice Thorez avec la réalité soviétique. (Pages 49 à 51.)	Comparaison entre les deux mondes : — le monde capitaliste pourrissant où les travailleurs sont exploités, menacés par les crises et les guerres ; — le monde socialiste en construction où les travailleurs sont au pouvoir, où l'économie se développe sans heurts en vue d'assurer le bonheur des hommes dans la paix.	Après une période de stabilisation relative (1921-29), le monde capitaliste subit une crise économique profonde : Voir « <i>Histoire du P.C. (b) de l'U.R.S.S.</i> », chap. IX, § 5 ; chap. XI, § 1 ; « <i>Œuvres</i> », livre II, tome I, pp. 64 à 71 ; tome II, pp. 11 à 15 ; tome III, pp. 13 à 37.
1929 : Début de la crise économique mondiale. (Pages 75 à 79.)		STALINE : <i>Les questions du Léninisme</i> , rapport au XVII ^e congrès, chap. I et II.

Réflexions personnelles
De même aujourd'hui, le Parti a raison de combattre la sale guerre du Viet-Nam, guerre injuste, contraire aux intérêts français, guerre menée essentiellement dans l'intérêt des impérialistes américains, et dont les peuples du Viet-Nam et de France sont les frais. « <i>Paix au Viet-Nam</i> » exprime le patriotisme et l'internationalisme des communistes français. Il nous faut poursuivre avec acharnement la campagne pour la libération d'Henri Martin. Nous devons faire connaître partout que sa lutte a été une lutte patriotique.
Les nombreux non-communistes partis en délégation en U.R.S.S. cette année (métallurgistes, médecins, universitaires...) ont exprimé leur admiration pour ce monde nouveau en marche vers le communisme, et leur confiance dans la volonté de paix des peuples et des dirigeants soviétiques. Les chantiers du communisme, chantiers de la paix, sont une réfutation concrète des colportages antisoviétiques. Le développement de l'Association Franco-U.R.S.S. aide à dissiper les préventions à l'égard de l'U.R.S.S. de milliers de braves gens, qui prennent conscience que la « civilisation » capitaliste signifie misère et guerre.

Appendix 4. APPRENDRE, mars 1953. Numéro spécial

MESSAGE
AU COMITE CENTRAL
DU PARTI COMMUNISTE
DE L'UNION SOVIETIQUE

Chers Camarades,

En ces heures douloureuses, où la mort brutale de STALINE nous frappe tous si cruellement, je voudrais vous dire combien je partage la peine immense du peuple soviétique et de son Parti communiste. STALINE était le chef, l'ami, le frère de tous les travailleurs du monde.

Il fut et il restera notre guide et notre exemple. Les communistes et les travailleurs de France sauront s'inspirer de ses enseignements, notamment de ses derniers conseils à la tribune du 19^e Congrès du Parti Communiste de l'Union Soviétique dans leur lutte pour la paix et pour l'indépendance nationale, pour la démocratie et pour le socialisme.

Je voudrais aussi exprimer aux camarades du Comité Central mes sentiments d'affection fraternelle et les assurer de mon attachement indéfectible à la cause de l'immortel STALINE, la grande cause du communisme.

Maurice THOREZ.

6 mars 1953.



Appendix 5. Letter written by Paul Fromonteil, accepting to give a lecture on the subject of "*Front unique*" at the one-month central school in August 1973

PARTI COMMUNISTE FRANÇAIS

FÉDÉRATION DE LA VIENNE

Le 3 Juillet 1973

Téléphone

- au Cde Directeur
ECOLE CENTRALE D'UN MOIS

Cher camarade,

D'accord pour assurer le cours sur le Front Unique le
MARDI 21 AOUT à 8h 30.

D'autre part, je t'indique que nous avons à l'Ecole
centrale qui se déroule actuellement un camarade de la Fédération de
la Vienne qui est un catholique.

Il me semble intéressant de te donner cette indication.

✓ 7 | C'est un camarade par ailleurs très solide politiquement et qui a
d'importantes responsabilités au sein de la Fédération des Maisons
de Jeunes et de Culture. Il s'agit du camarade BOUCHET Bernard.

Reçois, cher camarade, mes sentiments fraternels.

Le S.F. :
Paul FROMONTEIL
Membre du Comité Central

Appendix 6. Letter to Jean-Claude Delaunay, requesting him to teach political economy at the one-month central school in November 1974

École Maufice Thorez

le 23 septembre 1974

tél

À Jean-Claude Delaunay

94800 - VILLEJUIF

Cher Camarade,

Le développement important des écoles centrales de notre parti nécessite que nous élargissions notre collectif de professeurs, notamment en économie-politique.

Dans une lettre que tu avais adressée à Henri Charvet tu nous informais qu'il ne t'était pas possible d'assurer un cours à l'école centrale d'un mois avant fin 1973, mais peut-être te serait-il possible de le faire à présent. Si tu étais disponible, nous te solliciterions pour le premier cours d'économie politique (la marchandise) dès le début de novembre à l'école centrale d'un mois.

Bien entendu, nous tenons à ta disposition tous les documents et informations complémentaires que te seraient nécessaires.

Dans l'attente de ta réponse et en t'en remerciant d'avance, reçois cher Camarade nos fraternelles salutations.

P: la direction de l'école
Colette Maillot

RÉSUMÉ D'ACTIVITÉ DU MILITANT

retrograde. *Stabilization* scolaire, l'année, pas de
pour la même année.

Nom de l'entreprise _____ nombre de travailleurs _____

DATE ET LIEU D'ADHESION AU P.C.F.	ECOLE* DU PARTI SUIVIES
	dates
	* Elémentaires : _____
	* Fédérales : _____
	* Centrales 1 mois <input type="checkbox"/>
	4 mois <input type="checkbox"/>
	* Autres stages : _____

requiring a total of 1000 hours of training.

* Mandala destra : inusuale ?
Qualche dente ?

401

*L'argent des entreprises
ne doit plus
être
gaspillé!*



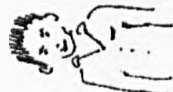
**DE L'ARGENT
IL Y EN A !!**

L'ARGENT DES ENTREPRISES

**DOIT SERVIR
À FINANCER LE SMIC À 6000*
À AUGMENTER LES SALAIRES
À CRÉER DES EMPLOIS STABLES**

**POUR GAGNER CELA
RÉASSEMBLONS-NOUS !**

**VOUS POUVEZ COMPTER SUR LES COMMUNISTES
À PCF**



*Je m'appelle Yves,
je suis ingénieur sur machines
j'ai 35 ans et j'habite
à Bayonne 42000 par mois.*



*Je suis Liliane Bellenfant,
je suis PDG de l'ordel
vous n'avez que MES machines
qui ME rapportent*

**TOUTES LES
3 MINUTES
6000 F !**

DE L'ARGENT

IL Y EN A !

**UTILISONS-LE POUR
AUGMENTER LES SALAIRES
ET
CRÉER DE VRAIS EMPLOIS !**

À PCF.

Appendix 9. "Menu de clôture" of the four-month central school 17.10.1988 - 3.2.1989

MENU DE CLÔTURE

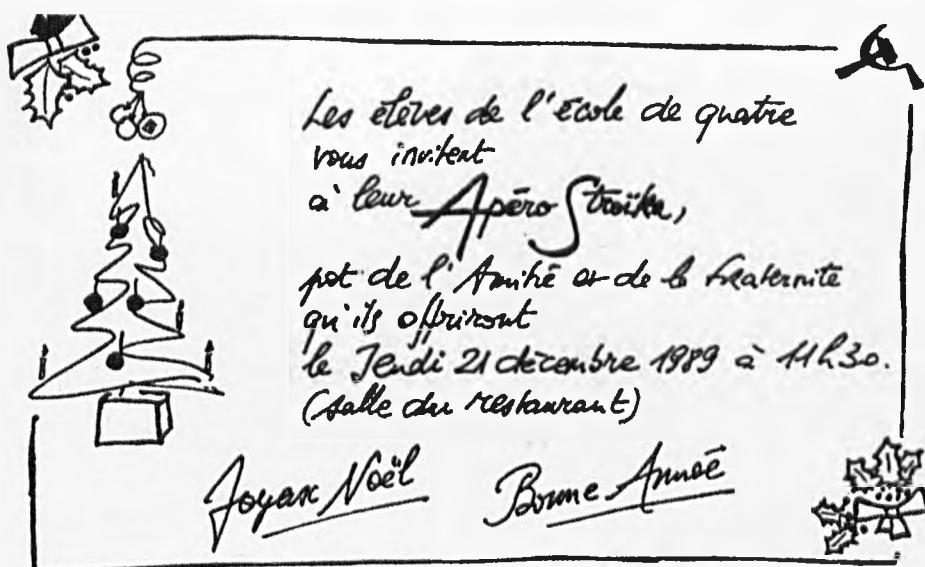
ECOLE DE 4 MOIS

LE 3 FEVRIER 1989

SALADE COMPOSEE
SAUMON FUME
VEAU ORLOFF,
CHAMPIGNONS - POMMES DE TERRE SAUTEES
SALADE FRISEE AUX LARDONS
PLATEAU DE FROMAGES
OMELETTE NORVEGIEENNE
CAFE
CHAMPAGNE

..

Appendix 10. Invitation to "ApéroStroïka" by the students of the four-month central school in December 1989



Dressé le 19 décembre 1989
Ecole Nationale du Parti Communiste
Français.

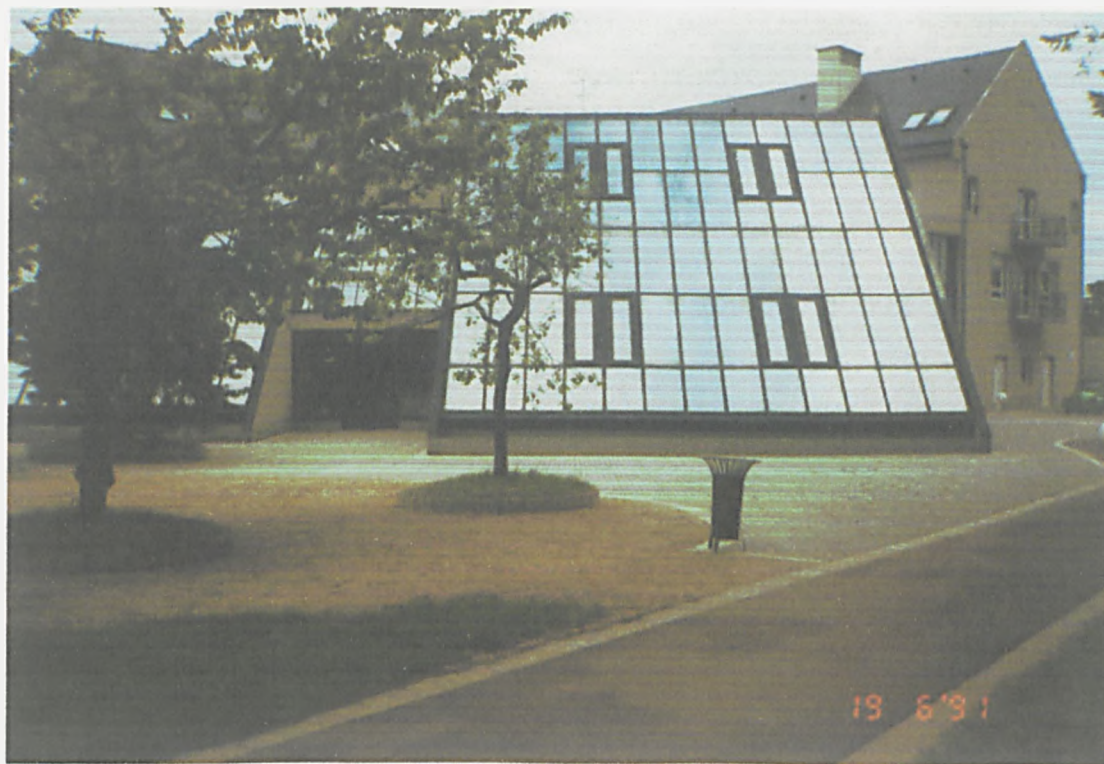
Appendix 11. Etienne Fajon during his interview 13.9.1991, at 2 place du Colonel-Fabien, Paris



Appendix 12. Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne, June 1991



Appendix 13. Ecole nationale du PCF, Draveil, Essonne, June 1991



Appendix 14. Roland Leroy, editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité*, and the author during a study excursion of the central school students to the newspaper's offices 19.6.1991



Appendix 15. *"Des élèves heureux"* of the one-month central school 20.6.1991



Appendix 16. Lunch break at the Ecole nationale, 20.6.1991



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CONSTANS, Raymond

GARNIER, Danièle

GOURINCHAS, Roger

LAVABRE, Marie-Claire

LENEVEU, Gérard

PUDAL, Bernard

RAUYER, Yannick

ROBRIEUX, Philippe

ROCHE, Pierre

ROSETTE, Marcel

VAGNERON, A.

Interviews conducted

AALTO, Arvo

17.12.1990, Helsinki

General Secretary of the Finnish Communist Party 1969-84

Chairman of the Finnish Communist Party 1984-88

Student in Moscow 1961-62

ACOT, Pascal

18.6.1991, Draveil, Essonne

Central School teacher

ARGELES, Jean-Marie
8.9.1991, Paris
Secretary of the Paris Federation 1971-79

BOSSU, Lucien
20.6.1991, Draveil, Essonne
Central School director 1991

BRIOT, Gabrielle
25.6.1991, Besançon (written interview)
Federal (1970) and Central school (1975) student

CHARLES, Robert
25.6.1991, Besançon (questionnaire and letter)
Central School student 1947 and 1952

CIRERA, Daniel
19.6.1991, Draveil, Essonne
Central School teacher, Member of the Central Committee

COIC, Albert
18.6.1991, Caen
Federal School student 1975

CONSTANS, Raymond
31.5.1991, Isle (written interview)
Central School student 1959-60

FAJON, Etienne
13.9.1991, Paris
In charge of the PCF's Education Sector
1935-1948 and 1974-79

FITERMAN, Charles
30.3.1992, Paris
Central School director 1962-65

GARNIER, Danièle
25.11.1991, Caen
Central School student 1987

GOURINCHAS, Roger
5.7.1991, Feytiat (questionnaire and letter)
Central School student 1953 and 1957

LANGEOIS, Christian
17.6.1991, Caen
In charge of cadre training in Calvados 1991

LAVABRE, Marie-Claire
13.9.1991, Paris
Sociologist

LAZARD, Francette
3.4.1992, Paris
In charge of the PCF's Education Sector 1979-84

LENEVEU, Gérard
25.11.1991 and 20.2.1992, Caen
Central School student 1984 and 1988-89

MARTIN, Henri
31.3.1992, Paris
Central School director 1978-83

MEYER, Jean-François
12.9.1991, 31.3.1992 and 8.7.1992, Paris
Deputy director *Secteur éducation du PCF*

PAGANELLI, Serge
21.2.1991, Besançon (questionnaire and letter)
Central School student and student in Moscow 1966-67

PASQUARELLI, Nicholas
9.9.1991, Paris
Central School Director 1962-66

POPEREN, Claude
1.4.1992, Paris
Central School student 1954 and 1959-60

POUCHIN, Michel
17.6.1991, Caen
Federal School student 1989

POUSSY, Guy
9.7.1992, Paris
Student in Moscow 1962-63

PUDAL, Bernard
3.4.1992, Paris
Sociologist and federal school student in the 1970s

RAUYER, Yannick
20.2.1992, Caen
Central School student 1991

RECOQUILLON, Denis
20.6.1991, Draveil, Essonne
Central School director 1987-90

RIORDAN, James
23.1.1991, Portsmouth
Student in Moscow in the early 1960s

RIVIERE, François
31.3.1992, Paris
Central School director 1977-83

ROBRIEUX, Philippe
30.3.1992 and 2.4.1992, Paris
Historian

ROCHE, Pierre
2.4.1992, 10.7.1992 and 12.4.1997, Paris
Sociologist

ROSETTE, Marcel
9.9.1991 and 30.3.1992, Paris
Central School Director 1956-63

SAARINEN, Aarne
19.12.1990, Helsinki
Chairman of the Finnish Communist Party 1966-82

TARTAKOWSKY, Danielle
11.9.1991, Paris
PCF historian

TERVONEN, Ilkka
18.12.1990, Sirola College, Finland
Director of the Finnish Communist Party Central School (1990)

THOMINE, Véronique
18.6.1991, Caen
Federal school teacher 1991

TILLARD, Jean-Claude
17.6.1991, Caen
Federal school director 1981-1991

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